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WINNIE AND I

I.

"Darkly we move—we press upon the brink
Haply of unseen worlds, and know it not."

"For life is but a struggle of base will
With intellectual purpose; and the rod
Which chastens pride is in the hands of God,
Who does not always smite, nor wholly kill!"

THE soft moonlight, bathing with pale rays the budding trees, and twinkling brokenly on little rippling streams and points of rocks along the road, found its way, not only through the carriage windows, but into my heart, which was softened and humbled by its silent influence, as great tears attested, that had been till now forbidden to flow.

How silent and cold the stars were, throned afar off in boundless space, living on in regal splendor, so passionless, so still! But the moon, so like a gentle step-mother, full of sympathy and good deeds, laying her fair gifts all about us, wins the stricken heart that yields to her meek, holy power. And mine, that had been so hard and

proud, yielded; and yearnings for holiness overpowered vain graspings after earthly idols, worshiped as divine.

We had passed the road, overhung on the left with trees and masses of rock, and were slowly crossing a wooden bridge that spanned a nondescript stream, too small for a river, but wide and deep enough to reflect the silver light that lay at rest on the surface here, but further down broke into ripples, and dimpled in eddies, over rough stones, and heaped-up fragments of rocks. I had only a glimpse of it all; and then in a moment we left the road that lay straight before us, as far as I could see from my window, and turned into a long avenue with thick trees, partially shutting out the light that, falling across them, threw long shadows on the ground, and wrought strange shapes among the branches, and about the trunks growing closely together. I could only catch indistinct glimpses of the house we were approaching, which seemed great, and desolate, and still, just as I had fancied it, with nicely-graveled walks about it that no one ever trod, and giant trees putting on spring leaves, that no one ever noticed, and flowers springing up, and blossoming, and withering, with no one to acknowledge their beauty and fragrance. And here, one heart, like the flowers, had sprung up, and budded, and blossomed, and was withering alone. Could I ever love that cold, stern, selfish heart? A cloud had come over the moon, and bitter thoughts were

springing up in the dark; but the shadow passed away as shadows are wont to do, and the light that followed was so clear I could read my heart by it; and, if I read aright, there was already a germ of love there for one who, however selfish and stern she might be, had been gentler once. She had loved my mother; and that sainted mother was so enshrined in my desolate heart, I could worship any thing that had known and loved her.

The carriage stopped suddenly before the door, and I stood at the foot of the steps a moment, irresolutely surveying the dark house that seemed only lighted from without, where the moon touched it; within, I fancied it full of locked-up rooms, and sounding passages, and shutters that kept out light and warmth. In answer to my timid ring, a small, precise-looking woman, with blue eyes and grayish-brown hair, opened the door.

"Is my grandmother—is Mrs. Wesson in?" I asked, hesitatingly. The little woman nodded, with a precise, pleasant smile. "It is Miss Brewster, I suppose—walk in:—Mrs. Wesson has been expecting you an hour or two."

So I walked in, and while she shut the door, made such discoveries as I was enabled to by the uncertain light of a small lamp, that flickered and nearly went out as a breath of air came through the door. A clock at the foot of the winding staircase ticked solemnly through the gloom; there was no home sound in its vibrations which were clear and strong like the throbbings of my heart.

The little woman locked and bolted the door, then came to the foot of the stairs, where I had taken my stand.

"Would you like to go to your own room first, Miss Brewster?" she asked, and I assented, wondering where I was to go afterward, as her question seemed to imply that my presence was required elsewhere.

Up the long flight of stairs she went, noiselessly as her shadow, that fell on the wall in grotesque and distorted proportions; and I followed her to a small room, neatly and tastefully arranged, which, she said, in a motherly way, would be mine as long as I chose to call it so. Then she placed the lamp on a small writing-table between the windows, and stood at the open door a moment, as if uncertain whether or not to commence conversation with one as reserved as I must have seemed; but it was only a momentary hesitancy, and then question followed question, as fast as I could answer, till I found myself in the midst of an animated colloquy with the little housekeeper, Mrs. Newell, who was fast gaining favor in my eyes. She had told me her name, and station here, and asked about my journey, and twenty other things, with her hand still on the door, and the same precise smile on her lips. But I forgave her for the precision, because it was in the very atmosphere of the house, and one who had been inhaling it, as she had, for the last ten years, could not easily cast off its influence.

Twice she had said she must go; and now she stepped across the threshold and closed the door, just opening it again a moment, to say that she would send Jane to help me unpack my trunks, and would come herself, in a few moments, to introduce me to my grandmother.

The first offer I declined, saying I should only open one trunk then, and needed no assistance; the second, I could but assent to, though I would gladly have excused myself for the present. I was tired, and felt unamiable: so I decided after Mrs. Newell left me to my own thoughts. I was quite sure my grandmother would not love me at all; and I was not in a mood to propitiate her favor then.

But there was no help for it, so I arranged my disordered hair and substituted a mourning merino for my dusty traveling-dress, nervously adjusting my collar, and smoothing the braids of hair, as I stood before the glass.

Still Mrs. Newell lingered; and I who had so lately dreaded to meet my grandmother, now impatiently longed for the interview to be over.

At the foot of my bed was a window I had not noticed before, so I drew my chair toward it, looped up the white curtain, and opened the shutters. A vine was trained across the window, but its leaves were yet in bud, so I could see through it a large garden with a grove of trees bounding its southern extremity; but the moon was so low I could not see the brook, that I knew by the soft, gurgling

sound, must be near. I was leaning out of the window, vainly trying to guess its distance by the sound, when Mrs. Newell, after a brief premonitory rap, entered.

"Mrs. Wesson has been an invalid ever since I came here," she said, as we entered the hall together, and approached the door next to mine.

"She is not very fond of talking, so you will find it rather difficult to get acquainted with her."

The last words were spoken in a whisper, as she opened the door, and ushered me into the presence of my grandmother.

She was sitting in a great arm-chair before a cheerful fire: for though it was late in the spring, the nights were cool and damp. A chair, seemingly placed for me, stood nearly opposite hers; so I advanced toward it, while Mrs. Newell nodded me a 'good night,' and closed the door.

All this while, the occupant of the arm-chair sat motionless, with her face turned toward the fire that blazed, and crackled, over a glowing bed of embers on the ample hearth. As I approached, the rustling of my dress—or, the sound of a strange step, it may be, aroused her from a reverie which must have been allied to a dream; for she looked at me a moment as if just awakened—then extending a long thin hand, welcomed me to her home in conventional words, that of themselves were kind and friendly, but they came from the lips only; I was very sure her heart knew nothing about them; and so I sat down premeditating a speedy escape

from her cold presence, hoping she would not speak again.

With closed eyes and folded hands she sat, dreaming, for aught I knew; so I scanned her face by the uncertain fire-light, and dreamed a waking dream. Had I but guessed that underneath those half-shut lids two keen eyes were scrutinizing me, reading me as I had never been read before, I might have quailed and shrunk into comparative nothingness; but ignorant of this I gazed steadily at the tall angular figure before me, guessing more than judging, that hers was a mind of masculine caliber, grasping abstruse sciences, rather than seeking feminine accomplishments. Deep lines about the large, firm mouth, told of suffering, and struggles with self, over which mind had gained the mastery. The expression of the mouth and chin was hard—very hard; but the brows wore a gentler aspect; it might have been the bright light falling there that relieved its sternness; as it was, something about the high, pale forehead, overarched with silvery hair, pleased me, and I smiled a thoughtful, half-unconscious smile. I fancied that love might break the spell, and bring forth answering love, from the sepulcher where it had been buried for many, and sorrowful years.

Suddenly those eyes opened—their gaze met mine, and I sat spell-bound under their influence. Their expression was not repulsive, but there was no warmth there—no sign of tenderness—no index of a heart yearning over a dead child's child. I did

not ask her love. The smile died away on my lips, but still my eyes sought hers with a strange fascination, till she turned again toward the fire, in which she gazed for two or three minutes (it seemed much longer than that), without speaking. When at length she commenced conversation, it was in a manner so evidently intended to draw me out, that I answered guardedly—replying in monosyllables when it was possible.

Of my father's life and death I said very little, though this seemed most to interest her. It was evident to me, half-child as I was, that she had hated him, and preferred hearing nothing good about him, at least. And my bereavement was so recent, I could not hear his name without a heart-full of grief, and eyes brimming with tears that I dared not allow to flow in her presence; so I talked at random about my journey—my long sea-sickness —my waiting alone for hours in a strange hotel at the city ten miles distant, for the carriage that was sent to bring me here—my moonlight ride and admiration of the scenery, till I began to be sensible that my descriptive talent was not appreciated, and that a retreat into silence, alone might save my reputation for reserve.

Blushing at my own temerity I ceased speaking, and tried to appear engrossed in the figures of the hearth-rug, feeling awkward enough in the silence that followed; vexed with myself for monopolizing conversation, vexed with my grandmother for not treating me like a child, vexed because I knew

less of her the longer I saw her, vexed because her quiet "good night" gave me permission to leave her —what I had been for an hour longing to do; vexed with her generally, and with myself particularly; while she sat fixedly regarding the embers, with the same stern look settled and deepening in the shadowy light about her mouth and chin.

As I sat by the vine-covered window, the west window of my little room, gazing out into the dark, still, starless night—for the moon had set, and thick clouds vailed the heavens—the remembrance of my father, rose before me like a vision, and his dying words came back to my heart: "Edith, love your mother's God: I too *might* have trusted—it is too late!"

I heard the words when he uttered them, and then a great shadow crept downward over his face, and his dear hands grew cold in mine; and I forgot every thing; dreaming strange dreams for many days and nights, that passed without my knowledge. But why should those words haunt me now? Was it because of this solitude that imprisoned me, and brought past scenes to drive me mad?

I kneeled before the open casement, and looked up toward heaven. They say heaven is above us, but I could not see it; and when I cried, "Jesus, who art thou, that I may love thee?" the form of the Crucified was hidden from my aching sight: for I longed for a palpable image—a something tangible, that I might grasp, and place with earth-

stained hands on the all unhallowed temple in my heart, whence it might not depart forever.

Oh, earthly will! Thou art strong in thine agony, but thou art not omnipotent!

I ceased wrestling with God, and the angel departed, leaving me unblessed. It was not prayer-wrestling: it was but the conflict of a heart "of the earth earthy," with the great Universe-Heart; and because they would not beat in unison, I tried to rise above my nature by earthly graspings, striving to assimilate my spirit in strength with the spirit of the Divine; not knowing, in my sinfulness and pride, that Deity bends from its white throne amid the winged to heal earth's pleading ones, nor that the Immaculate vailed his glory and dwelt in lowly temples of the forgiven, shedding blood on Calvary for the sins of a world that condemned him.

II.

"Sorrow that, like an ocean, dark, deep, rough,
And shoreless, rolled its billows o'er the soul
Perpetually, and without hope of end."

POLLOK.

"But I lay silent in the muffled cage of life."

TENNYSON'S *Princess*.

THE morning broke, damp and cheerless; the winds, sighing and moaning through the trees, foretold the coming storm; and I longed for it to break in fury, that, amid the conflict of elements, the conflict of mind might be overpowered and hushed. The rain came, at length, pattering through the dark trees among the half-opened leaves—it came gently, soothingly. It was not what I had longed for, but it brought with it a quiet that was grateful.

My grandmother received me kindly, when I went at a late hour to bid her good-morning, and asked me to breakfast with her. I should feel lonely, she said, in the large dining-room down stairs. Then she did make some slight allowance for the frailties of human nature!

I looked at her wonderingly.

As we sat together at the small breakfast-table, old memories came crowding over me in the still-

ness, sending hot tears to my eyes that I tried to force back, hoping my grandmother did not notice my agitation.

"Foolish child! What could ever escape her observation!" I said to myself when I found that she had been watching my mobile features from under those long, black lashes, and thought to change my mood by sending me down into the parlors, and about the house wherever I might choose to go, giving me a great bunch of keys, that, she said, were seldom used, but would hereafter be at my disposal.

How I blessed her in my heart for trying to please me! Yet I went out from her presence lingeringly, listlessly counting the stairs as I descended, not caring to go on—not choosing to return.

As I opened the first parlor door, it seemed so dark and chilly, with its covered furniture and closed shutters, that I involuntarily stepped back into the more cheerful hall, and stood for a long time looking out of the narrow windows at the rain dropping mistily on the steps.

But the house was so enveloped in the thick fog, that I could scarcely see beyond these steps; and, tired of counting the rain-drops, I turned back into the parlor, and tried long and patiently to raise the windows. When this was at length accomplished, and the shutters thrown wide open, the paintings with their dark carved frames first claimed my attention. After studying one and another in various

lights for an hour, or two, or three—time was then nothing to me—I pushed back the heavy folding-doors, and stood in the back parlor.

Oh, the sweet girlish face that gleamed out from the canvas as the rays of light touched it!

It was so loving, so pure, so all too fair for earth, that I wept with a bewildered joy—a heartfullness that could not be suppressed. And near it hung another—an older face; but it must be the same—and both must be—my mother!

A vision has passed before me many times in the night-watches, a gentle spirit-form, whose presence has seemed to make my dreams sweeter, and I have looked into just such young spiritual eyes, and wondered at such a glory of golden hair, and longed to touch the darker, still fair braids, that made more beautiful the older face; and when I have essayed with a vainly eager longing to clasp the glorious vision, and call it mine, I have wept just such bitter tears at its departing, as I should weep to see these faces vanish.

In the front parlor hangs a picture I could never tire of studying—a very apotheosis of the portrait with the braided hair; and now I go from it to my mother's, and from my mother's to it, comparing, as only the heart can compare, that blessed Madonna-face, halo-enringed, with the gentle, saint-like mother-face.

In the darkest corner of the back parlor hung a portrait of my father, painted years ago—proud-looking, as he always was—not handsome, but no-

ble; oh how noble he looked to me! Those eyes, large and dark, seemed to follow me about the room; and I, half fearing, returned again and again to catch their expression.

How gently he always spoke to me! How his usual sternness gave place to loving words and caresses, when, after days of mental toil, he came late at night to his home where music, and laughter, and pleasant words awaited him, and the cloud left his brow as he crossed the threshold where care was a stranger!

As I looked long and tearfully at that face, could I believe that when the light of those eyes was shadowed, and the sound of that voice hushed, amid all the "many mansions" there was not one prepared for him?

Oh how plainly above the sighing of the wind and the falling of the rain could I hear that voice saying to my spirit, "Thy mother's God is here—seek Him!"

But my heart was hard and proud; its sorrow had not wrought in it purification; it had but stirred its worst passions, and made it rebel against justice, demanding mercy for the dead at any cost.

With sinful, bitter thoughts, that found a ready home in my heart, I dared not look again at the three beloved faces; two were too holy, the third with compressed lips seemed to have just uttered, "I too might have trusted—it is too late—too late!"

So with a determined will to silence the inward monitor that would not grant me a reprieve, I turned from the pictures, and resolutely closing the shutters, and relocking the doors, passed across the hall to another door opening into the music-room.

This was her piano—in that furthest corner stands her harp, these were her music-books whose leaves now yellow with age, the white fingers I can not remember have turned. It is well that I have no remembrance of her. She is to me an angel-mother, and I would not have her seem less heavenly.

Every nook and corner holds some memento of her. The paintings hanging on these walls, are lighter than those of the parlor. It was a girlish hand that placed these on their easel, slight fingers that blended these warm tints so mellowly. Let all the light the dark day can give enter here:—gloom can not render it more, nor light less sacred.

At the furthest corner, a door opened out upon the garden. The vines from this porch sheltering the door, must be the same that crept over my window; interlacing their soft tendrils, twining in and out where the light might reach them. This vine-covered porch was such a surprise and pleased me so well, that protected by its shade I sat training up the shoots that lay trailing on the ground where the rain had beaten them down, till the storm ceased, and the sunlight burst out brightly,

scattering my dreams to the winds that had swept by, and were gone.

Every thing seemed so fresh and beautiful after the rain, that I half forgot my resolution to like nothing here, and found myself standing on tip-toe gazing beyond the stretch of sloping garden, at the river that twinkled among the thick trees. The first impulse was to run through the walks to the high fence at the furthest extremity, where I hoped to find a bramble-choked gate such as I had read of, supposed to have been closed years ago, and rust-locked; for I could not think my grandmother so unromantic as to allow her indefatigable gardener the pleasure of keeping every thing in perfect repair. But then I was not shawled and bonneted, and I might meet some one in those woods —though it seemed hardly a supposable case—who would think me a very unsuitable person to belong to that dignified, proper, old house; so I would try to content myself, and wait till just at sunset some fine night, when I could steal off unperceived by any one in the house.

That time was destined to be some days distant, and several fine nights passed unimproved; for in consequence of unaccustomed exposure to the damp air, and also in penance for sitting as Mrs. Newell found me, with my feet in a little pool of rain-water, I was shut up in my room for long weeks, with a slow fever that deprived me of strength, leaving my nerves in an exceedingly unstrung condition.

Jane, Mrs. Newell's trustiest servant, took quite

a fancy to me in my illness, and came up half a dozen times a day to inquire how I was, carrying on whispered conversations with the nurse when I appeared to be dozing, asking if I ever expected to get well, and whether I ever said any thing about dying, and commenting at large on my pale face and thin hands.

But dear Mrs. Newell used to come in often to take nurse's place, and she smoothed my pillow so gently, and arranged the room so quietly, that I looked anxiously forward to her coming and tried to be very patient while she was with me. Sometimes she indulged in her propensity for talking, and told me of some one—I did not remember the name, who had called several times to inquire after me, and it troubled me very much: for when I slept that somebody would be constantly asking how I was: sometimes it came and rapped on my door, an old man with a long grizzled beard who frightened me; and then it would be a young girl, bringing fruit and flowers, her voice sounding just like the ripple of the river.

Then at night, the great old house was so still and I so wakeful—the lamp so dim and nurse so sleepy—the fire danced and flickered so on the wall and there were such strange voices in the air, now murmuring like the sea, now moaning like winter winds, now liquidly dropping around me. The last was soothing like the pattering of rain-drops and often hushed me to sleep: and then a sighing, sobbing voice would awaken me, close by my

pillow: but when I turned there was nothing there but the red fire-light still glimmering on the wall, the lamp burning dimmer and nurse asleep.

Then again the clock ticked so loudly I could not think; and when I tried to count the beatings they seemed to be approaching the bed, whispering words I did not care to hear, close, close to my ear, then retreating away so far I could not follow them; and their last faint whispers were "Too late—too late!"

And in my sleep I would hear the fluttering of angel-wings, and voices of summer-air melody; the misty clouds that had touched my pillow would be wafted away, and up, up through ether, would break forth a shining path leading to the glory I could not behold.

Then the Sinless beckoned me on with gleaming wings folded, treading the path slowly, and I essayed to follow. But the way was long, and Faith faltered—Hope grew weary and Love slept; then it was that Fear overcame Love, and Distrust slew Hope, and Unbelief buried Faith.

So the shining ones spread their wings and fanned the mists about the pathway, and the reft clouds closed over it, till I wept in darkness for the path of angels, and turned to follow the footprints of mortality.

III.

"——And daylight dies away;
Dies away and leaves me lone
With dim ghosts of years agone,
Summers parted, glories flown."

How delicious was the sense of life—of a lately ebbing tide flowing again—when I ventured to peep out at the vine-entwined lattice, the music-room door beneath my window. Then the old desire to penetrate those woods, and trace the course of the stream came back, and every pulse throbbed for liberty that had been so long denied.

But it must not be now, so shutting myself once more from the outer world, I tried to make my world within, and forgot the woodbines, the autumn-tinted flowers, the oaks and maples, where blended hues of the summer passing and the winter to come, and the sound of rippling waters that brought me dreams by sunlight, and sunlight in dreams.

But what should I do?

The house I had explored from parlor to attic; finding unexpected doors opening into undreamed-of rooms, old, and quaintly furnished, with the accumulated dust of years settled on pictures and

mirrors:—here a room precise, and dark, and gloomy; there one that delighted me with its huge straight-backed arm-chair with faded cushions, and footstools made in a forgotten year, framed pictures in worsted faded beyond description, and two or three paintings whose peculiarity of coloring neither sunlight nor dust could dim.

Across the window a rugged vine trailed, rich in foliage, clinging to sash and casing. Through its leaves, folded and ill-shapen, half crushed by clasping tendrils and close contact with the window-panes, the sunlight struggled, falling aslant the arm-chair with its wealth of dust and gossamer webs, upon the polished floor.

Tiny mice peeped out from beneath a chest of drawers in one corner, and numberless spiders festooned the walls, and lay in wait for unsuspecting prey that whizzing about the room, became entangled in the filmy meshes.

No sound from below reached this room, not even the murmur of the water; but the wind stirred the leaves, and I knew how it must moan and sigh when winter came with storms of rain and sleet.

I had turned from this window and sought the pleasant music-room door, but a gust of cold air sent me back; so drawing an ottoman near the low window, I sat and pondered long what I should do. I would not go to my grandmother's room, for while she grew paler and thinner day after day, she characteristically chose to remain alone.

If I had only a sister, a cousin, a friend, to sit by me now, to cheer me when desponding; for I had been for so many weeks unable to leave the house, I was almost in despair. But I had no one.

Meanwhile the room grew dim; low confused sounds usurped the silence; and with head bowed on my hands, I dreamed that darkness vailed me, as if invisible hands noiselessly hung funeral folds of drapery about me, and ebon wings fanned the heavy air whose weight oppressed and bowed still lower my bended head.

In the midst of this gloom a star stood out suddenly, radiating light soft as fleecy sunset clouds; gently came the rustling of tiny wings—lovingly a milk-white dove nestled in my bosom. Soft eyes were upturned to mine—silently snowy pinions were folded; but an evil spirit came over me, and I repulsed it harshly. Still it hovered near, coming again and again, seeking rest for its tiny feet, and folding for its pure wings; and again I drove it from me, yet listened for the sound of fluttering pinions, striving to lift my head when it ceased.

Away it flew, and the dark folds parted as I watched it, then closed around me deeper, heavier than before; while the star, gathering up its rays, melted away into the darkness.

I awoke with a sudden start. The sun had set, and twilight shadows were thick in the room; so I closed the shutters and went slowly up stairs, wondering what my strange dream meant.

IV.

"A mouth he has, but words hath he none."
LYDGATE.

SUMMER had ripened to autumn—autumn withered to winter. Frosts had fallen, and storms of snow, and rain, and sleet, had beaten down and covered every green and pleasant thing; and mourning winds wailed requiems for departed glories of summer and the autumn time, bringing the breath of icebergs and a thought of Polar seas.

But one day, after a week of darkness, the sun parted the clouds, scattered the mists, and shone down gloriously on gnarled branches, and twisted twigs, and huge trunks of trees incased in ice, glittering and dazzling like great gems of untold price, down on the snow-covering of earth. At noon thin clouds gathered again, the sun struggled through banks of mist, and a warm, dripping rain fell slowly but constantly, loosing the tree-bands, perforating the snow-crust, and discovering hidden paths that were fast becoming miry beds of miniature rivers.

All night long the rain pattered softly about the eaves, with a soothing sound like that of the brook,

whose voice was now drowned in the steady dropping.

The morning did not dawn—night only wore away, leaving its mantle to the coming hours we are wont to call day.

After my lonely breakfast I slipped away to the attic-chamber, drew the great arm-chair to the high window, and, wrapping the folds of my shawl about my feet, nestled down in the cushions. Three giant pine-trees had guarded this window a hundred years, and tendered their mute homage to the skies in centuries long gone by; and now I lay and looked up through them to the heavens, dreaming of that "far-off land of beauty" where the voice of many waters ever flowing is sweeter than the warbling of myriads of earth-birds; and the songs of the ransomed, and thanksgivings of the blood-bought, roll on unceasingly as the Waters of Life.

But oh, that heaven stretched so far away, with its treasure of angels and the glorious Presence! Did the Son of God but walk the earth as in ancient days, how would my heart enthrone and worship him!

Poor heart, that knew not what it needed! that could not frame a single petition—that could not find God! and so groped on in darkness when light was all about it, mourning for a something unattained. The pine-trees wailed "*eheu, eheu,*" and sudden gusts of wind shook the wet branches that went swaying up and down. The vine hang-

ing over the window grated harshly against the panes, trailing through pools of water on the sash that trickled down mistily, and so shut out from view the trees, and the wooded hill beyond, the curve of the brook at its base, and the road that wound in and out among the oaks and maples, then crossed the bridge and disappeared behind the hill. So drawing my shawl about my shoulders, I pushed back the great arm-chair and slowly descended the stairs.

Mrs. Newell, who had just left my grandmother's room, looked up in surprise.

"Dear me! Miss Edith, have you been up there all the morning in the cold? Do come into my room and get warm; it 's enough to freeze a body to look at you!"

So I followed the little old lady to her large pleasant room, and took the chair she placed for me before the fire, watching her as she "tidied" the always neat-looking room, arranging nicely-packed lavender-scented drawers, and removing imaginary dust from the bureau and chairs.

Then drawing her little work-stand and rocking-chair to the window, she produced a great ball of yarn from her ample pocket, took the knitting-sheath from her work-basket, in the very depths of which she found four shining needles, and commenced a stocking, briskly counting the stitches as she proceeded.

I was thinking of that "somebody" who called so often to inquire after me when I was sick; and

while waiting for a convenient opportunity to introduce the subject, I wondered how it could have slipped my mind for so long a time.

In answer to my inquiries, Mrs. Newell gave me a long history of the feeble minister who had preached in the village church for thirty years, and was now resting from his labors in the old parsonage just across the brook.

Emily, his oldest child, she said was only fifteen when her mother died, leaving in her care, Angus, a wild, thoughtless boy, and Winnifred, or Winnie, as every body called her, who was scarcely a year old. Then she told of Emily's noble, self-sacrificing spirit, and of her good influence over her brother and sister, both of whom were now away from home—Angus at college, and Winnie at a boarding-school.

"That is probably the reason why Winnie has not been to see you since you were sick," said Mrs. Newell; "it was her vacation then."

She gave me barely the outlines of each character—for the good old lady was not critical—so I sat for a long time, filling them up to suit myself. It gave me something to think of; and for a full hour I was in a happy, dreamy mood, that was quite an agreeable change from those to which I had been for many weeks accustomed.

Toward evening the rain ceased, and I knew by the roaring of the brook, that the water must be rapidly rising, so throwing on my hood and shawl, I slipped out of the house unperceived, and passing

down the long avenue to the road, went on till I came to the bridge.

Huge cakes of ice came tumbling rapidly onward, dashing against the banks with a dull echoing sound, the water rising higher and higher, whirled and foamed a miniature maelstrom. As I stood leaning over the side of the bridge, impatiently waiting for the enveloping mists to roll away, the clouds parted and the moon stood out suddenly, full and clear, silvering the trembling masses of ice, sparkling on the foam, and dancing about the eddying waters, on which I gazed with such an intensity of joy, that I was unaware of the rapid rising of the water to a level with the bridge, against which ice and floating timbers were driven with a dull jarring sound. On came the masses, crested with foam, whirling, crashing directly toward the bridge, near the center of which I stood, when a strong arm was thrown around me, and I felt myself suddenly lifted from my feet, and placed in the road, on the opposite side.

I looked up to thank my preserver, who with folded arms stood watching the bridge which had been torn from its abutments, and was floating down with the current.

"A beautiful stream, Miss Brewster, but not so pleasant a night for a sail as we sometimes have."

"I am very much obliged to you for depriving me of that pleasure," I answered, trying to guess who this man could be to call me by name so familiarly.

As he was enveloped in a huge overcoat, and his face rendered almost invisible by a cap drawn down over his eyes, I had just arrived at the conclusion that he was some one employed by my grandmother, when a slender girlish figure I had not seen before, laid her hand on his arm, saying, "Won't you introduce me, Gus?"

"I have not had an introduction myself," he answered indifferently, still watching the bridge that fell in pieces as the drift-wood and ice dashed against it.

The little figure hesitated a moment, and then came around to the place where I stood, inquiring with a half-timid smile, if it was Miss Brewster, and introducing herself as Winnifred Holmes.

"My brother doesn't appear more than half-civilized," she said, laughing, then added in a lower tone, "It is his way—he never seems to take any notice of strangers—but you must excuse him; he'll come to his senses by and by."

How easily one gets acquainted in the open air. There is no formality in such accidental meetings.

We were soon engaged in conversation, and had left the road to follow a narrow path that curved in and out among the trees, before I thought to ask where we were going.

"Now," said my little companion, anticipating my question, "you are going home with us. O, I am so glad! Emily will be *very* glad to see you, and so will father—for you know you can't get home to-night."

"But," interrupted I, "no one at home knows where I am."

"O we 'll see to that! brother Gus will go up across the village bridge, to Mrs. Wesson's"—and, without stopping to finish the sentence, she darted back a few steps to inform her taciturn brother of her plan.

I could hear her eager voice, but he made no reply, and I was troubling myself with the thought that her proposal might not be agreeable to him, when she came running back to overtake me, exclaiming, "There 's Emmie coming to meet us! She must have heard the crash when the bridge fell, and we have stayed so long, she is afraid we have gone with it!" and with that she darted off, her pale face flushed with excitement, leaving me, as I supposed, with her brother. How he had contrived to be spirited away, was altogether beyond my comprehension; but when I turned to look for him, he was certainly not in sight: and I stood still for a moment, wondering whether I had not had a glimpse of fairy-land, and after being rescued from imaginary peril by a brownie, and piloted through the forest by an elf, had been left to await the coming of Queen Mab herself.

But the figure now approaching was decidedly taller, and more robust than that of her who comes

> "In shape no bigger than an agate-stone,
> On the fore-finger of an alderman."

Moreover, her voice was mortal-toned, and the hand she extended to greet me was exceedingly like a very common composition of flesh and blood, so I accepted it, together with a cordial invitation to spend the night at the parsonage.

We were just at the edge of the woods, and in two or three minutes had entered the gate and passed through the wide path nearly to the door-step, when Emily turned into a narrower walk, saying,

"Come to the side-door, if you please; I fastened this before I went out."

The side-door opened into a pleasant, low-walled, simply-furnished room. In one corner was a light stand, holding a work-basket, two or three books, and a shaded lamp. A wood-fire was burning on the hearth, which Emily replenished quickly and quietly, then drawing up an arm-chair, she smilingly placed me in it.

"No, no," said Winnie, "let her come to my room first, and—"

"Would that be best?" asked Emily in a gentle but decided tone, "her clothes are quite damp, as well as yours."

Winnie half pouted, but said nothing; and I was beginning to feel uncomfortable in the stillness that succeeded, when the door was opened abruptly, so abruptly that we all started, and Angus strode in, tossing his cap on the table, and tipping Emily's chair to an angle of forty-five degrees.

He stood directly in the light, showing off at the

best advantage a mass of hair on the sunniest side of auburn, a square forehead, frank pleasant eyes, and a large and by no means handsome mouth. I sat in the shade, and as he was looking very intently into Emily's eyes, I felt at liberty to criticise as much as I pleased.

Winnie formed a perfect contrast to her brother, as she stood at his side waiting for a word, her bright eyes turned toward him, her lips half parted, and her dark hair shading a white forehead, high and finely formed; while Emily who was resting at equipoise look troubled, and every now and then in a low tone pleaded with her brother to let her go.

"Gus, do stand there all night and not tell us where you 've been!" said Winnie, who was growing impatient, at the same time placing a chair for him near Emily, and drawing her own to complete the semicircle, midway between his and mine.

"Why do you ask him, if he does n't wish to tell?" said Emily after she had put three or four questions, receiving only a comical glance in reply to each one.

"But he *does* want to tell," persisted Winnie, "only he likes to have me teaze him."

"Then I would n't gratify him."

This last suggestion Winnie heeded, and commenced an animated conversation with me, glancing occasionally at her brother to see if he was not yet in a mood to enlighten her. But as he sat quietly by Emily with his hand on her chair, con-

versing in a low tone apparently oblivious of all others, we talked on; and Winnie forgot to question him any further, so engaged was she in telling of his popularity in college, and high standing in his class, and of her own hopes and plans for the future.

It was her vacation now, she said, but her father and Emily thought she had better stay at home through the winter, as she had a cough, and was not very strong, and she supposed herself that she was rather imprudent when she had no "mother Emily" to watch over her.

Then Gus would be at home, and I lived so near, she would not be so lonely as she had fancied at first.

And so we talked on till nearly midnight; when Emily rose and lighting two smaller lamps from the shaded one, placed one in Angus' hand, the other in Winnie's, smilingly saying, "I have to send these children to bed:—you look tired Miss Brewster, but Winnie never thinks of resting as long as she can talk."

I was not sleepy, but had a violent headache, so I told Emily, and we three went up together, leaving Angus to follow at his leisure. Just as Emily was closing the door, he called her back.

"Tell Miss Brewster I have been at her grandmother's."

I commissioned Emily to thank him for his trouble, and then she came up and joined us at the head of the stairs.

"Now," said Winnie as we entered a large old-

fashioned chamber, "I am going to make you at home in my room to-night. Emmie and I have each a room of our own, though we sometimes occupy one, and sometimes the other together; but this is my acknowledged property, which I shall be most happy to share with you, or you may have it alone, but I can not give you up to Emily."

The elder sister smiled; I said perhaps Emily would n't have me under any consideration, and Emily said, possibly she might be prevailed upon to endure my presence; Winnie laughed and throwing both arms around my neck, playfully claimed me, and gentle, lady-like, motherly Emily closed the door, promising to call on us before she retired.

I heard her lightly descending the stairs, then lay with half-closed eyes watching Winnie as she busied herself about the room, talking all the while of our accidental meeting and informal introduction, and her many fruitless attempts to become acquainted with me before.

Presently she ceased speaking, and drawing a chair near the stand at the foot of the bed, opened a small Bible, and read a moment, then extinguishing the light, knelt by the bedside in silent prayer.

I was thinking the while of a home, oh how well beloved!—of a form mingling with the dust—of the love-light quenched in a dark bright eye—of the gentle good-nights repeated on the thresholds of that home to which I might return—never!

The moonlight streamed through the blinds, and

I thought how that same soft brightness fell aslant a mound—

"Miss Brewster," said Winnie, softly, and I brushed away two great tear-drops before I could answer.

"Please don't call me Miss Holmes again."

"Very well, I will call you Winnie, if you will call me Edith."

"Edith—is that your name?"

"Yes."

"It is n't a very pretty name, is it?"

"I like it because it was mother's name."

"Well, Edie is pretty—may I call you Edie?"

"Certainly."

I did not tell the child-like creature beside me that dear silent lips once murmured "Edie—Edie my child—my darling." I could not tell her that no one had called me Edie since.

"Where can Emily be?" said Winnie starting up suddenly, "I mean to go and see!"

"Is n't she coming up stairs?"

"Hark!—yes, let 's be asleep."

So Winnie closed her eyes like a little child, and lay motionless. Emily came in quietly, leaving her lamp outside. First she dropped the curtains to darken the room, then came and leaned over Winnie, whose countenance indicated perfect repose. Seeing me wide awake she said in a whisper "Winnie is a good sleeper—are you wakeful?"

"Sometimes," said I, "but I shall be asleep presently."

After the door closed Winnie remained quiet so long that I thought her in reality asleep, till she whispered, with her eyes still shut—

"Edie?"

"Well."

"Do you ever say prayers?"

"No."

"Have n't you in all your life?"

"No:—yes—sometimes."

"I thought children always prayed—that is, *little* children.

"Emily taught Gus and me, but now he is so old I don't believe he kneels down and prays. It does n't seem as if grown folks prayed like little children, does it, Edie? I mean grown folks who are not Christians."

Winnie talked on for several minutes, and then dropped quietly asleep, while I lay and pondered what she had said. There was more meaning in her simple words than she had imagined; and I thought if I were but a little child I could find the way to heaven.

V.

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial—
We should count time by heart-throbs."

FESTUS.

IT was yet early in the morning;—a bright, still February morning, harbinger of the sunnier days in reserve, that yet lay folded germ-like in their perianth of weeks, when I stood in the garden waiting for Winnie, who had volunteered to accompany me home. The white-haired father called me "daughter" when he bade me good-morning; and that simple word, linked with a gentle voice, won my heart.

As he turned to enter the house, the sun shone full on his pale face, and broad, high forehead with its thin, silvery locks brushed smoothly backward, and I fancied it formed a glory about his head, like that encircling the angel-features of St. John.

Winnie came bounding out of the house, as I stood watching the retreating form of her father.

"Shall we take our path by the river, Edie? You know we must cross the village bridge."

I had only seen the bridge she spoke of from

my attic window, and it was just the morning for a long walk, so I readily assented.

The little footpath ran along the edge of the woods, following the course of the brook, over which slender willows drooped, and great oaks bent till their branches touched the clear water, and were mirrored in its depths. But now this path was covered with stones and timbers: masses of drift-wood were wedged between the trees, and tangled roots and fibers swung in matted bunches from the low limbs; so we struck out a path for ourselves on higher ground, and wound in and out among trees, and stumps, and dead underbrush, forming plans meanwhile for future meetings, and talking ourselves into a state of forgetfulness of the present.

As we paused occasionally to take breath, sitting on a stump or log, or high rock, from which we could see the sunlight on the river, I studied in a disconnected way my bright little friend who had already taken possession of a large corner of my heart. Simple, earnest, and wondering as a child, overflowing with poetry and romance which gushed out in words and expressions—sensitive, absent-minded, thoughtless, reveling in day-dreams and golden fancies, thirsting for all knowledge, perfectly unsatisfied with her present attainments, continually grasping after things too high or too deep for her developing mind yet to comprehend.

"Oh how I love to study things I can not perfectly understand!" she exclaimed suddenly, after

sitting quietly for two or three minutes on a mass of rocks, watching the bright sky and shifting clouds. "Pascal says 'the highest perfection of human reason is to know that there is an infinity of truth beyond its reach.' And I do so love to think that by-and-by I can grasp these things, and see clearly through truths that are wrapped in webs of words, and made so complex that we can not yet simplify them. But oh, to think that this worthless clay covering should trammel the immortal soul made in the image of Deity! that all its glorious aspirations—its longings after better things, should be driven back and chained here! I am so disgusted with this fetter—I long to throw it aside, and expand my wings that are bound down too closely to soar at all. But to think, Edie—to think that one day these links will be broken, and we, standing in the light of God, shall know all things;—immortal, omniscient—oh, shall we not be omniscient as Himself?"

Winnie's eyes were filled with tears, and her cheeks flushed with the poetry of immortality:—after all, was it not something better than mere poet-inspiration?

Was there not a hand beckoning her to the skies?—a voice saying "Come up hither and taste immortal fruits, and behold the Waters of Life, of which if ye drink ye shall nevermore thirst?"

So spirit-like she seemed, so fragile, like a "spirit of fire in a shell of pearl," that I turned away to hide my tears; for I saw that the fire was slowly

consuming the shell, in which it was pent only to burst forth purer and clearer at no far-distant day, to burn on God's altar through all eternity. But with the thought came a prayer from lips unused to pray—"Oh God, lay not thine hand upon her yet!"

When I looked back—for I had been walking rapidly on—she still sat as when I left her, on a heaped-up mass of stones, her hands clasped over her knees, and her face turned toward the river which gleamed in and out among the trees. A slight rustling among the leaves startled her; and picking up her bonnet which had fallen from her lap among the stones and brush, she seemed just waking from a long dream to a bright reality. The momentary flush had left her cheeks very pale, but her eyes were none the less bright as she called out cheerfully,

"To the foot-bridge, Edie!"

So I retraced my steps, and tried to keep pace with her as she went boundingly along, now over a stump, now down in a hollow where she would hide to startle me as I came more timidly on.

Two or three times she caught her dress against some low projecting branch; but the accidents were always accompanied with a laughing "never mind," that put all attempts at sympathy out of the question.

"Here we are at the foot-bridge!" she called out, loudly, as I was grasping a tree to prevent sliding down the hill. "Only look, how beautiful!"

A great log was thrown across the brook that here ran shallowly over white pebbles, while on either side the trees guarded it, and shed their leaves upon its ripples.

Winnie threw herself on the ground, and with one arm resting on the log, and her head bent forward over the stream, half sang, half recited, in a low musical tone that seemed a song to the brook's accompaniment—

"Flow down cold rivulet to the sea,
Thy tribute wave deliver;
No more by thee my steps shall be,
Forever and forever.

"But here will sigh thine alder tree,
And here thine aspen quiver,
And here by thee will hum the bee,
Forever and forever.

"A thousand suns will stream on thee,
A thousand moons will quiver;
But not by thee my steps shall be,
Forever and forever."

But while Winnie's quoted words seemed half prophetic, though she sang them idly—playfully, other thoughts were busy in my brain, and my heart's song was a dirge—

"Break, break, break,
On the cold gray stones, O sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

"O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play;
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay.

"And the stately ships go on,
To the haven under the hill—
But, O, for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

"Winnie, where are you?" shouted Angus; and Winnie jumped up to answer, "Come and see."

After he joined us, we walked together a long time without speaking, till the trees grew thinner, and we suddenly came upon a road meeting at nearly right angles the one I could see from my attic window: but where was the bridge?

Winnie looked, and rubbed her eyes, and looked again: but the truth flashed over me sooner, only a glance from Angus sealed my lips.

"Why, where—what—how queer this is!" said Winnie, still dreamily searching for the lost bridge: "But I really do believe—yes—I 'm certain—the bridge is gone!"

"Then that is, upon your word and honor, your private opinion, backed up by the evidence of your seven senses, is it?" asked Angus with his usual

gravity, while Winnie, too much engaged to heed him, went on, abstractedly soliloquizing.

"Why, where could it have gone? O, why yes, now I know—Gus, the freshet carried the bridge away, did n't it?"

"Well, if it did, and if you know it, is my word necessary to make it any more surely gone?"

"But," said Winnie, still paying no attention to his interrogatories, "as we can't go on, we may as well be philosophical—let 's find a nice warm place, and spend the morning here."

"And then what?" interrupted Angus.

"Why, then—I don't know—go back home. How long will it be before they can build a bridge?"

Angus laughed outright. Winnie looked up in an absent sort of way: she was just beginning to think that her mind had been wandering down stream after the missing bridge.

"Now, Gus," she said, perceptibly brightening, "I did n't mean that, and I consider you a very rude young man, to laugh in this way at your own sister, who happened to be thinking of something infinitely superior to yourself, and could not at once summon her faculties to bear on unimportant things; but really now, how can Edie get home?"

"By the foot-bridge," suggested Angus, so we retraced our steps, and in a few moments stood by the log, which, though firmly placed upon the bank at either end, was elevated three or four feet above the water.

"I presume you are not accustomed to crossing such bridges, Miss Brewster," said Angus, looking at me for the first time, as if calculating whether or not I should be afraid to attempt it.

"Oh, I am not afraid," I answered carelessly, still half doubting my ability to preserve my equilibrium, on that smooth, slippery log, which he crossed first, waiting for me on the opposite side. So I said good-by to Winnie, and started courageously, but had scarcely reached the middle when the water appeared to be in the incipient stages of a maelstrom, the log oscillating with a steady unpleasant motion that made me giddy.

Winnie, laughing till the tears stood in her eyes, called out,

"Don't stand on ceremony, Edie; wait till you get across before you bow."

Just at that moment, the same strong hand that saved me the day before, was reached out; and with its help, I landed safely, in time to see Winnie run lightly across, stopping near the center to perform sundry evolutions, that made me dizzy again. Angus saw my anxious expression.

"She has done it a thousand times," he said, catching her up on one arm, and bowing me a good morning. But Winnie said,

"No, no, Gus; let me get down—I'm going clear home with her."

"How do you know that she wants you to?"

"O, I know," and Winnie struggled to unclasp his arms.

"I will take good care of her," I interposed.

"And," said Winnie, "Emily will not want me to-day."

"Let her stay till evening," I pleaded; "she shall not go home alone."

"No," said Angus, "if she will stay, I suppose I must come after her."

I was about to speak, but Winnie hushed me, whispering,

"He wants to come!"

We watched him as he crossed the bridge, and entered the woods, and then went home together.

Winnie was overflowing with happiness.

"I do love you so," she exclaimed, stopping suddenly, and throwing her arms around my neck, "It seems as if I had always known you! Do you love me? Though I suppose you can't very well, for Emily says I have a great many faults: I believe I am made up of them altogether, only some are so much worse than others, that they swallow up the little ones. Sometimes, my friends like me for a little while, but it is impossible for them to love me as I love them."

"Then other people have no faults, and you bear the world's burden of them on your shoulders: is that it?"

"Well, I don't mean that, but if other people do have failings they are not like mine, they are good ones, and so I love them, faults and all."

"That is your virtue, not their's."

Winnie looked up in surprise.

"Other people may have a faculty of concealing their defects of character, which you have not, and a sort of 'I am holier than thou' semblance of goodness; and these, your dear simple little heart falls down to, and worships, after elevating them on pedestals of its own building; while that same prone heart is just as far superior to its gods, as light is to darkness—or truth to falsehood."

My little auditor was silent, evidently only half believing me. Had she not loved me, I should have been contradicted on the spot; but as she was in the habit of implicitly trusting her friends' opinions, she took mine and to all appearance soon forgot that part of the conversation.

"Will you stay in the parlor while I go in to see grandmother?" I asked as we entered the silent house, so great and gloomy in comparison with the nest of a home we had left.

"O let me go to your own room, may n't I," she pleaded. "This does n't seem at all like you, and how do I know but you may be spirited away and I left here alone? For charity's sake take me along."

And so we went together, first to my room where she admired every thing, from the bare branches of the vine creaking against the window, to the tiniest prints on the walls and the shadows of the trees flickering over them. Here I left her, and knocked softly at my grandmother's door. Mrs. Newell with a whispered good-morning, bade me come in.

Mrs. Wesson was asleep now, she said, after a restless night, and she hoped she would be better when she awoke. She had been very anxious about me, after it was known that I was not in my room; the house had been searched, and they were in doubt what to do next, when Mr. Holmes came.

Then my grandmother was not after all so indifferent to me as she appeared; the thought gave me a pleasurable sensation. But why exhibit such manifest coldness toward me? Altogether it was a mystery; and I was of the right age to invest mystery with poetry and romance, but not old enough to be seriously disturbed thereby.

Very long did Winnie and I sit by the window, she with her hand in mine, school-girl like, telling of her hopes and plans for the future. I, talking of the past, with its many joys and one great sorrow.

Then came a long chapter on school friends; at the head of which, in the middle, and at the end, was Julia Arnold. This station I judged from Winnie's praises, she owed principally to her beauty.

"Oh, Edie!" she exclaimed, in a perfect ecstasy of enthusiasm, "if you could only see Julia, dear, darling Julia! Why she is beautiful as a poet's dream! the very embodiment of poetry herself! her form—her smile—her every motion, is living, breathing poetry! And so unconscious she is, too! The girls call her cold and proud, but they are only envious! why she is every inch a queen, and

should of right be proud! but she is so darling—so lovely! Then little Kit Russell is a queer genius—nearly as old as I—and I shall be sixteen next month, but such a little thing, and wild as she is little. You would n't think such a tiny creature could hold so much mischief; and she does n't long, for she plays all sorts of tricks on the girls, and even says half saucy things to Mrs. Talcott—that 's our teacher—and nobody thinks of blaming her.

"She is one of the best scholars in school, though how she gets her lessons must be a mystery to herself, it is at any rate to every body else, for she keeps Childe Harold, and Rasselas, and Mrs. Hemans, and Faëry Queen, and Shakespeare, and Young, and I don't know what else—a perfect jumble of books in her desk.

"Sometimes Mrs. Talcott looks up gravely through her spectacles—she wears them, though she is n't very old—and says,

"'Kittie, my dear, what are you doing?'

"And Kittie says,

"'Studying the cause and effect of St. George's killing the Dragon.' Or perhaps it will be,

"'Reading about Desdemona—Mrs. Talcott, was Othello really black?'

"Mrs. Talcott always says,

"'Put up the book *immediately* my child;' while Kit's friends smile, and her enemies exchange glances with each other, wondering how she dares answer Mrs. Talcott so.

"But Kittie is an orphan, and has been at the school four years; so of course she seems very much like a child to Mrs. Talcott; and then she is so good-hearted and truthful, that you can forgive her when she is sometimes pert.

"Nobody dares say an unjust thing of any girl in Kittie's hearing; and she even takes lame Emmy Arnold's part, when she is never in good humor, and looks so ugly if the girls say any thing about her in jest.

"Kittie gets so angry then—you ought to see her little fist clinched, and her eyes sparkling like fire!

"But Julia! O Julia is so dignified:—she never mingles with the romping set, who call her 'our haughty Queen Julia.' She tells me about it herself; but nothing they say can disturb her at all. She seems of so much nobler nature than they. What a grand queen she would make! a perfect Zenobia! and I would be her Fausta, and follow her to battle or to death!

"I could fight against a legion for her, and—"

Winnie stopped suddenly, looked blank a minute, then very good-humoredly joined in my laugh, saying apologetically—though the apology might have been more for my lack of appreciation, than for her enthusiasm—"I say a great many sentimental things Edie, but I'll see what *you* say when she comes here next vacation. Remember—you don't know Julia Arnold!"

"Are there no more wonderful ones?" I asked, after Winnie had been silent a moment, evidently

wondering whether her friend would be appreciated here.

"No, there are none at all wonderful except Julia, and not a great many very interesting ones.

"There is Susie Aymar, always getting into trouble, and crying her eyes out about it, without spirit enough to be frank, and own up like Kittie.

"And then Jerusha Eveleigh is another queer genius: she is our poetess; always sighing over spring flowers, dandelions and all, and weeping over beautiful sunsets, and composing awful tragedies. She writes her name 'Jessie Eveleigh' in all her books; so the scholars all call her so, and half of them think it 's her real name.

"Honest Sarah Greyham, universally called 'Grey,' occupies the desk next to Jessie's in the school-room, and is, I do believe, the only real friend she has. And so our poetess hands her productions over to Grey as fast as they are written, which is usually just after she has failed in recitation, and Grey puts them carefully in one corner of her desk till recess. I don't believe she could be prevailed upon to look off from her book in school-time. There she sits her allotted six hours, and works away at her lessons till the veins stand out on her forehead; and then, she does n't begin to keep up in recitation with Kit Russell.

"But after school, Jessie hangs over her desk, and then the scraps of paper are produced, and read by both simultaneously—Grey reading just as she studies.

"Generally, she likes whatever Jessie writes, and tells her she had better publish her pieces when she gets older; but the poetess shakes her head, and says she will leave them with Grey—she 'expects to die young.'

"Grey does n't appear to notice the melancholy tone in which the last clause is spoken, and says if writing poetry is what makes people die young, she shall live to be a hundred.

"One day at the close of school, when most of the girls were gone to their rooms, I asked her if she had never attempted it."

"And had she?" I inquired; for I thought Grey quite a character in prose, and was anxious to know how she succeeded in verse.

"Well," said Winnie, "she looked at me a moment; then taking from her portfolio a well-preserved scrap of paper, she laid it in my hand without speaking. I unfolded it, and read—

"'The moon looked down on a quiet bay.'"

"'Where is the rest?' said I.

"'Oh, that 's all!'

"I laughed, and she laughed too.

"'You see,' she said, 'one moonlight night about three years ago, I got sentimental, and wrote that; but the inspiration went while I was looking in the dictionary for a word to rhyme with *bay:* so I laid the paper by till it should come again—and it never came!'"

"Why, Winnie," said I, "your Grey is quite as wonderful as your goddess Julia; and I believe I should like her a great deal better."

An incredulous smile was my only answer.

Half an hour later Winnie was installed in the great arm-chair in my "sky-parlor," notwithstanding all Mrs. Newell's remonstrances.

"Why, dear children!" she exclaimed, coming out of her room just as I was leading the way up stairs, "don't go up into that dirty attic, it 's a great deal pleasanter down in the parlor."

"Oh, we 'll come down there presently," said I, still going on.

"But do wait till Jane has swept, and dusted, and put things to rights."

"Oh no, Mrs. Newell," interposed Winnie, "we want it just as it is—dust and all."

So we prevailed over the tidy housekeeper, who reluctantly yielded.

"What would my grand old room be worth," queried I, sitting on the cricket at Winnie's feet, "if all this rubbish were to be burned up, and modern furniture substituted—if my drapery webs were usurped by folds of immaculate muslin, and this great rugged vine cut down to make room for practical blinds?"

And Winnie said,

"Mrs. Newell would put it in splendid order!—what a development that phrenological organ of hers has!—like some great awkward parlors I have seen: so full of clean nice draperies, and

statuettes, and vases, and all sorts of fussy accompaniments, and so guiltless of dust and air, that I could n't breathe in them if I would, and would n't if I could.

"Oh, Mrs. Talcott's parlors are arranged to a charm, Edie!

"There are two of them, very large, and pleasantly light, with great windows shaded by flowing muslin curtains, looped up with porcelain roses and buds.

"Then the chairs are grouped gracefully, and every ottoman and divan is in the right corner, and every thing about them is so easy and natural, that you can't for the life of you feel awkward or out of place in whatever part of the rooms you may chance to be.

"But these are only thrown open on reception evenings;—I have n't told you any thing about those, have I?" And Winnie rambled on for a half hour or so, describing the various gentlemen who were permitted to call one evening in the week; the majority of them being brothers or cousins of the young ladies, or particular theological friends of Mrs. Talcott—closing with a most pathetic appeal to me.

"Oh, Edie, *do* say you will go back to school with me!

"Don't kill me by saying 'no,' my adorable!

"I positively can not exist there without you.

"Don't you see I am crazy already to introduce to you our exquisite city, with its delightful walks,

and hill, and river—and our perfect Mrs. Talcott, our Minerva-like teacher, minus the crescent, and helmet, and attendant owl, and instruction in navigation, etc.—and Zenobia the peerless—and honest Grey (beneficent queen, pardon the juxtaposition!)—and Melpominean Jessie, wasting the radiance of a falling star (her favorite simile) on an unappreciating world!

"Tell me, Edith, my beloved! vision of all things desirable! will you—in plain Anglo-Saxon—ask your grandmother if you may go with me?"

"Yes."

If Winnie was crazy at first, she raved now, and clasped her hands—in the midst of her ecstasy springing to her feet so suddenly that she destroyed the equilibrium of myself and cricket; then throwing herself on the floor where the cricket and I still lay, she smothered me with caresses, till I pushed her off, declaring that I would neither go with her nor speak to her again, if she went mad after this fashion.

I did not tell her of the conversation I had with my grandmother six months before, in which she spoke of my entering this very school, for I feared the child would never come to her senses if she knew with certainty that I might go.

Just then the tea-bell rang, and Winnie scrambled up hastily, begging me to pin up the rents in her dress, and to help arrange her hair before we went down.

I assured her that we should take tea alone—that my grandmother never came down stairs; but she was afraid Gus might come, and seeing her in such a plight, tease her without mercy, as she said he always did.

While she stood at my window, waiting for me to finish my toilet, the door-bell rang.

"There! I know that is Gus," she said, sorrowfully, "why did he come so soon?"

"But he will stay to tea, and perhaps we can prevail on him to spend the evening."

Winnie shook her head.

"You can ask him, but I don't believe he'll stay."

And I did ask him; and to my infinite surprise, and her boundless satisfaction, he graciously assented, making himself very agreeable, and amusing us with college anecdotes, and delineations of student-character, while he sipped his tea.

Afterward, we went into the parlors, where he became obliviously absorbed in a great, dark-looking painting, that I had never thought particularly noticeable: and Winnie cried over my mother's portrait, and said it looked "just like an angel."

Then we went into the music-room; and at Angus' request, and, with his gracefully volunteered assistance—for I found that he could be both gracious and graceful when he chose—the piano was opened, and the music-book produced.

I played indifferently, at sight, accompaniments to simple airs, singing soprano, while Angus' voice

swelled out in deep, mellow bass tones, and Winnie joined in with a clear, pure alto.

And so with singing, and long conversations in the pauses of the music, the evening passed swiftly; and long before we were ready to say good-night, the clock in the hall struck ten.

In vain did Winnie plead for another half hour; Angus would not consent to another minute; so I brought her bonnet and shawl, and went with her to the door, where we stood for full five minutes, interchanging promises to call on each other very often.

"You must spend all next week with me," said Winnie. "I have ever so many things to tell you. Won't you promise?"

"Come home, sentimental school-girl," interrupted Angus. "You'll bore your friend to death. Don't come, Miss Brewster. If you do, she'll return the compliment, and we shall have to put her in a straight-jacket, in a fortnight."

It was long past midnight when I closed my eyes.

I had a habit of lying with them open, when I could not sleep, and this night the darkness seemed more than usually attractive, and, when at length the lids grew heavy, they closed so gradually that I seemed still awake.

Very pleasant were the dreams that floated through my brain till day-break, when I awoke, feeling younger than before, by ten years; for I had grown prematurely old in my seclusion.

VI.

"Thine heart shall not weary of him: thou shalt not secretly despise him.
Thou art long in learning him, in unraveling all his worth;
And he dazzleth not thine eyes at first, to be darkened in thy sight afterward,
But riseth from small beginnings, and reacheth the height of thine esteem."
PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY.

IT was a lonely March morning, cloudy and dismal.

The skies had been threatening rain for three days past; and, what was still more aggravating, to one so long expectant, the consummation of the threat seemed as far distant as on the first day. Altogether, it was such weather as makes one unambitious, and spiritless; and I dreamed away the time in a monotonous manner that was gloomily oppressive.

Books of every description were strewed on sofas, tables, window-sills, and chairs: study was out of the question—music impracticable—writing with a befogged brain ludicrous. Working hours they were, but I knew not how to employ them, unless—

A bright thought struck me. I would go to the parsonage, where a welcome always awaited me, and see if I could not make myself useful there.

Half a dozen times had I crossed the foot-bridge

in pleasant weather, to sit with dear father Holmes, and quiet Emily, learning lessons of patience and resignation from both; or to climb hills, and make discoveries along the brook, with Winnie; or, to tease Angus out of his sullen moods, and vex him when good-humored.

Every time we met, we quarreled; in downright earnest, too; for he was provoking, and I recriminating; but every disagreement only made us better friends.

I liked him, as I came gradually to know him better, and he, finding me not entirely spiritless, as he at first judged, offered firm friendship, which was accepted, and returned word for word.

At our first meeting, had he not saved my life, and so put me under obligation to tolerate his presence, I should have avoided him with a feeling of strong antipathy.

There seemed a lack of heart, and consequently, of fine feeling, that repelled me; but as his cold—and as I thought—impolite reserve vanished, I found that a great, warm, generous heart throbbed in its right place, and that the first reading of his character was a superficial one.

I found, also, that it was one not to be read very soon, nor very easily.

One bright day, when Winnie and I had climbed all the hills we could find within a mile or two, and traced to their source three or four tiny tributaries of the brook, I sat down, exhausted, on a great flat stone, by the side of which a little stream trickled

down from steep to steep, while she went in search of a path, that, she was very sure led directly home.

I wiled away the time thinking pleasant thoughts, and playing with the cold water, damming it up with one hand, till the pond above was filled to overflowing; then suddenly removing the obstruction, I was watching it as it swept away the dry leaves lying on the brink, when Angus quietly seated himself beside me.

My thoughts had for some moments been wandering, and were not readily to be collected; so as I could think of nothing particularly suited to the occasion, I said nothing.

"Miss Brewster," he began, half interrogatingly; but I did not answer: I can not tell why, unless it was because I never knew what to say to him.

"Miss Brewster, you dislike me very much."

I could neither be sufficiently polite to contradict him, nor impolite enough to tell him the true state of my mind; so I was still silent, saying all the while to myself,

"I am glad if you know it, and I *do* wish you would go away and not talk to me;" hoping that Winnie would come back and break the uncomfortable silence.

"I would n't make you wait so long for an answer," he said at length, as I again placed my aching hand under the stream which stopped trickling, and seemed with him to be waiting my reply.

"Then you wish for one?" I said, impatiently

vexed at his coolness, and trying not to answer rudely.

"Oh, no! I was only saying I could answer a similar one in less time."

He evidently expected me to ask it; so still watching my pond which had began to overflow, after oozing through my fingers, I said,

"Do you dislike me?"

"Very much."

The words were spoken so emphatically that I looked up; but catching a merry expression of his eye that belied his words, I was sorry for appearing so vexed, and smiled in return.

"Give me your hand," said he, quickly, extending his own.

"I tempted you to tell the truth and say you hated me, but you have resisted the temptation bravely: we shall be better friends hereafter."

I gave him my hand, and our cool reserve ended there, where our friendship began.

I was thinking this all over, as well wrapped in shawl and furs, with a small work-basket on my arm containing a piece of unfinished embroidery, and some recently copied stanza from a favorite poet for Winnie, I closed the door, and took the path to our foot-bridge.

A new bridge now crossed the brook where the old one was swept away, but it was not very much nearer in that direction, and the old path belonged more exclusively to us—Angus, Winnie, and me; so I decided at once on the latter, and went on,

thinking how Emily would look up in quiet surprise at my coming, while Winnie would hug me in a noisy demonstrative way, and lead me to "father's room," where a warm shake of the hand, accompanied with a reverent, "God bless you, my daughter," always awaited me.

Angus was coming toward the bridge when I reached it, in all probability on his way to make me a long morning call; as was his habit when tired of studying at home.

"There!" he exclaimed, when I was within hearing distance,

"I knew you could n't exist much longer without seeing me, so I came here to meet you."

"I wish I had gone the other way, just waiting behind a tree to see your woe-begone countenance as you left grandmother's door, with a heart full of disappointment—"

"Full of what?"

"Disappointment. The sensation you of all others are continually experiencing, when—"

"A sensation that never yet found its way to my heart!"

"Your vacuum, you mean. Who ever tried to flatter themselves, or you into the belief that you have a heart?"

"But it 's a convenient word to use, so I am often betrayed into an error, and can readily excuse you for—"

"Now see here, Edith Brewster," interrupted Angus,

"I say I *will not* quarrel with you to-day—so talk away, as hard as you please; I am as impervious as that rock!" striking his hand heavily on a great one beside the path.

"You were coming obviously, and expressly, for the purpose of inquiring how soon Madmemoiselle Julia is expected at the parsonage. Why did n't I think of that before!"

"Ask me any question you please, about her; I shall of course never suspect, as Winnie might, that you are at all interested—shall not dream of any reason why you should appear particularly pacific just now!"

"Of whom were you speaking—of Winnie or me?

"I was in a state of absorption commonly called absent mindedness just then, and only heard half a dozen words or so."

"Those were sufficient—*three* would have expressed an interesting volume:—'Julia Williston Arnold!'"

"Oh! Miss Arnold! thank you for the reminder.

"I had forgotten how deeply I was in love with her, and minus your assistance should have been compelled to apply to Winnie for particulars. Here she comes now; and will give us all necessary information."

"Winnie, Winnie!" he shouted, as after dropping at the door a paper parcel, and a plate which was broken on the stone step, she came bounding down the garden-path to meet us.

"How is it about my falling in love with Miss Arnold? Edith here, wants to know; and has really been so inquisitive, that I am in one overwhelming blush, from my chin to the tips of my hair inclusive."

"Every separate hair?" asked Winnie, laughing, with one arm around my waist, and one hand on his shoulder—"How easily they do blush! Perhaps it 's natural!"

"Oh child! how perfectly absurd!"

"Not half so absurd as the merest supposition that our Edith could be for one moment sufficiently interested in you to inquire about your silly love affairs—is it Emily?" appealing to the latter, who stood in the door with floury hands, and sleeves rolled up above her elbows.

"See there, Winnie!"

"Oh! I know, Emmy. I'll cry in a minute, that is, as soon as I've taken off Edie's bonnet;—but if people will make plates of such brittle stuff, they must expect them to break every time a body drops them!"

"I should think you would be afraid to let Winnie unpin your shawl," said Emily; "she makes a cushion of my shoulder, when I allow her to assist me."

"Oh, Em! that was only once, and then I happened to be thinking of something else. The best of people will make mistakes sometimes."

"Hypothesis number one," said Angus, at the door.

"That our Winnie is 'the best of people.' Em,

would you believe it? Your friend, Miss Edith, actually had the assurance to assert that I was going to call on her this morning, because she found me walking toward the foot-bridge!"

"She would n't have needed 'the assurance,' if she had heard you half an hour ago, teasing Winnie to go with you to Mrs. Wessons'. How did he get away so quietly?" asked Emily, perceiving that her words did not reach the ears they were intended for.

Winnie saw him slip slily up stairs, when Emily commenced speaking, and hoped he would stay there all day.

So saying, she laid aside my shawl and bonnet, picked up her paper parcel, and the bits of broken plate, and demurely seated herself at the table where Emily was rolling pie-crust.

"Please make me useful," I pleaded, folding up my embroidery, and replacing it in the work-basket.

So I drew my chair near Winnie's, by the long table, and Emily gave us raisins to seed, nutmegs to grate, and eggs to beat; magnanimously allowing us to imagine our services indispensable in that kitchen, where every thing was done so systematically, so well, and so much more quickly, when only one pair of hands were busy, than now, when three were employed.

"Now go and sit with father a little while," the motherly housewife said, covering with a white towel the loaves of cake on the shelf, after the last pie had been placed in the oven.

So we left her to put away flour, and spices, and egg-basket, and raisins, and went—Winnie leading the way—to "father's room," which had once been his study.

Now he was an invalid, and sat in his great arm-chair through all the day long, only venturing into the garden when the sun shone out clearly, and dried the frosty walks.

It was a sore trial to him to give up his charge —to feel that he could nevermore minister to his people in holy things; but that another must go in and out before them in his stead, breaking unto them the Bread of Life.

"'He must increase, but I must decrease.'"

With what holy resignation were these sad words spoken! How tender were the letters written to the young pastor, after his acceptance of the charge—

"My son, 'few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.' And now, He, who 'knoweth the end from the beginning,' hath laid his hand upon me, not heavily, but guidingly; and through all this cloud that separates us from him, I can catch bright glimpses of the Father's love.

"'Be strong in the faith,' my son, and may 'the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.'"

As we entered the room, he looked up from the Bible, which lay open before him, and smiled as we drew our footstools near his chair. For a moment his hand rested on my head: it was his habit when I thus sat by him, and all the room seemed holy. Never did I feel God's presence as in that place. It seemed an "inner sanctuary"—a "holy of holies," within the vail.

He had been reading the last chapter of Revelation, and his pencil mark was around three verses.

"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and his servants shall serve him.

"And they shall see his face and his name shall be in their foreheads.

"And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever."

"I am going soon, my daughters, but you may precede me," and his clear voice grew husky. "Death tarries long at my door, but he may come to you first; and shall I know, my beloved ones, that you are safe in the bosom of my Father and your Father? Shall I know that over you death

had no power—the grave no victory? That these immortal ones are robed in light, and with His name in their foreheads shall go no more out from His presence forever?"

Large tears rolled down Winnie's cheeks, and when he ceased speaking, her face was hidden in her hands: but there was a great weight on my heart, and I had no tears to shed.

"How is it possible," I asked, at length, "for those whose dearest treasures are shut out from Heaven, to be happy there?"

"My daughter," and again that dear hand was laid gently on my head—"all things are possible with God—His ways are not our ways—but we know that justice will be done the dead."

"Justice! Yes, *justice*, but not *mercy!*"

Still a ray of comfort penetrated that rebellious corner of my heart—I could not tell why or how, for it was no new truth; and the solemn words that came continually to my mind, "Be still, and know that I am God," overpowered, and hushed all vain murmurings.

"May I come in?" asked Emily, at the door, holding up a letter as she smilingly advanced, her hand trembling, and her cheeks flushed with excitement.

In a moment, Winnie's tears were forgotten: but a death-like pallor came over her father's face, which checked Emily's smile.

"It is from Harrie Keene, father—only from Harrie," and she brushed back his white locks, and smoothed his pale forehead caressingly.

I rose to leave the room, but Emily detained me.

"Stay, if you please, dear; I should like to have you hear my letter, too. It is from an old friend, who has been living in Florence, for four years past, but now on her way home."

"O! O!" cried Winnie.

"And that is not all, Winnie—but let me read it. Hush! now; you must mind me, and sit still, and not interrupt me with interjections at the end of every sentence."

So Winnie folded her hands on her father's knee, turning beaming eyes toward his at every mention of himself, or Emily, or Angus, or "baby Winnie," as the absent friend styled her.

The letter was very long, describing many a city rich in works of art, through the halls of whose palaces the writer had roamed at will; lakes set gem-like in fair valleys fanned by breezes of eternal summer; and rivers like bands of silver when the moonlight was on them. But her heart was yearning toward her own country, and her own people; and no classic river could ever be half so dear to her as the noisy brook at home.

Very affectionate were her messages to all the household; yet underneath those loving words, one might catch a tone of deep-seated sorrow, or something akin to it, that overshadowed all the sunshine of the writer's heart.

At noon, the storm so long foretold by leaden clouds and chilly winds fell like an April shower;

and when I would have started for home, before dusk, the path was still so wet that Emily insisted on my staying till evening. Then, when "father's chair" was drawn from his study to the warmest corner, near the fire that blazed and crackled on the hearth, and Emily had placed her work-stand opposite it, Angus read aloud, while we sewed industriously.

I loved to watch Winnie's face with the red firelight flashing across it, while he thus read gems of his own selecting from favorite authors.

Now, with hands folded over the work in her lap, her dark eyes were moist with unshed tears, then bright with sudden gladness, or wandering from her brother's face to the embers glowing in the ashes, grew dreamy and dreamier, till the lids, with their long lashes, half closed over them.

Angus well knew what a spell there was for her in poet-dreaming, and loved as well as I to watch the effect of his voice, rising with grand passages, to the acme of sublimity, or slowly sinking to the depths of tenderest pathos.

His nature, like hers, was deeply appreciative; and this, combined with a voice of rare richness and compass, gave to his reading an irresistible charm.

Of this, he himself was sensible; for how could he help but know his power with Winnie before him! But this was not enough. Emily, like Martha of old, was "careful and troubled about many things;" and while Winnie intensely enjoyed the

present, the elder sister heard only here and there a sentence; so far into the future would her thoughts wander, painting a home-scene, like this, perhaps, with a vacant chair beside the hearth-stone.

But Angus knew that I was listening; and he surmised that I liked poetry, and beyond that, that I liked to hear him read it; so I never looked from my work, or glanced at Winnie, when his eyes were turned toward me.

Who has not at some time sat in the presence of another, and known, though occupied with books or work, that that other's eyes were upon them, yet appearing the while unconscious of it?

So I sat that evening, while Angus watched stealthily for some sign that might indicate pleasure, and assure him that he was capable of swaying other than his sister at will. Nor was it at all gratifying to his vanity, of which he had a large share, to find that, to all appearance, I took no notice of—at least, was not at all affected by—the grand, and beautiful, and touching things he read. He felt that I had discovered his weakness, and it angered him.

The clock in the kitchen struck nine, and I rose to go in search of my bonnet and shawl.

Winnie pleaded,

"*Do* stay a little longer;" but I knew that good Mrs. Newell would be dozing in her chair in another half hour; so she reluctantly brought my rubbers, and laid my shawl around my shoulders.

My white-haired friend had already withdrawn to his study; so the good-nights were speedily said, and I stood at the open door before Angus was ready to exchange his dressing-gown for an overcoat.

"Wait a moment," said Emily, "Angus is n't quite ready."

But I held up a warning finger, thereby imposing silence and secresy on both, and slipped around the corner of the house, where the shadows were deep.

The rain had long since ceased, and the evening was clear and bright, and so still that I held my breath when Angus opened the door; nor did I dare to move till he was lost in the shadows far down the path.

My first impulse was to follow him at a distance, as he walked hurriedly along; but the moonlight overhead, and crackling leaves under-foot, might betray me; so I stole cautiously away from the house, and ran up the path leading to the road.

So eager was I to reach home before him, that I hurried on over dry branches and rustling leaves, scarcely pausing to breathe till I gained the road.

At some distance from me, and near the entrance of the avenue, I fancied I could see a moving figure; and supposing it to be Angus, stood partially concealed by the trees till he should pass.

How long I waited I can not tell—but it was very cold standing still; so advancing a few steps, I glanced cautiously along the road, which lay full

in view in the bright moonlight. Neither man, nor rock, nor bush, was in sight.

"The figure was only an imaginary one, and I am not timid, nor easily startled;" so I reasoned, and started on, every foot-fall echoing clearly on the frosty ground.

Far up the avenue, the house, dark and high, with its many wings and tall chimneys, threw a long, deep shadow; and not a ray of light penetrated the closed shutters. I knew that Angus must have been there already. Would he go in and inquire for me, or, feeling quite sure of my safety, return.

Suddenly I was startled in my cogitations by a low, wailing sound, that, coming as it did on the still, frosty night-air, thrilled me with a feeling of indefinable fear. I listened. It was repeated.

My heart throbbed audibly, and I seemed transfixed to the spot.

What should I do? Should I go to the house, and alarm its inmates? It was yet a long walk to the door, and the sound seemed near.

To the right of the avenue, near a curve in the road, the trees grew thickly together, and the rank underbrush had not been cleared away for years.

"Some one has wandered from the road," I thought, absurd as was the supposition; and then flashed through my mind old tales of heroic maidens, who had braved dangers, seen and unseen, to rescue strangers in peril or distress, and I was resolved to be as brave as they. Besides, my danger, if there

were any, could not be *unseen* in this moonlight; so with half a dozen confused examples in my mind, and my heart in my mouth, I went rapidly in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

Half a mile down the road that curved around these trees, lived a half-crazed woman—"Aunt Nellie" they called her—and in her insane moods she often wandered along the road at night, muttering to herself, and calling to the few passers-by, to bring back her boy; for, years ago, it was said, her only child disappeared mysteriously; and her mind, naturally weak, had received a shock from which it never recovered.

So, fearless in this last conjecture, and confident of seeing at no great distance Aunt Nellie's plaid shawl, and long gray hair escaped from her scanty hood, in rapidly going on I nearly stumbled over the prostrate figure of a man, who lay at the root of a tree, with his face buried in his hands.

Suppressing a startled cry that rose to my lips, I inquired in a tremulous voice,

"Are you injured?"

The figure made no reply; and fearing the stillness more than the wailing, I stooped down, and laid my hand on his shoulder. It was seized in a vice-like grasp—in a moment the stranger stood erect.

"Angus!"

"Edith!"

"How could you frighten me so?"

"How could you give me occasion to?"

"Did you stand at the entrance of the avenue a few minutes ago?"

"I believe so; and did you hide behind a tree?"

"I believe so; and you did this on purpose to frighten me!"

"And you ran away, on purpose to tease me!"

"I wished to punish you for being angry with me."

"And I wished to punish you for punishing me. But how do you know that I was angry?"

"Were you not conscious of it yourself!"

"I was."

"I should have been angry under the same circumstances."

"Edith, I would n't acknowledge it to any one else—I am—well, you know what I am, a great deal better than I can tell you. Here we are at the door—Good-night."

VII.

"Look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold;
There 's not the smallest orb, which thou behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubims:
Such harmony is in immortal souls."

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

"Of comely form she was, and fair of face;
And underneath her eyelids sat a kind
Of witching sorcery."

POLLOK.

MAY came, at length, with its soft skies and dewy showers, its oak tassels and tender maple-leaves, its tiny flower-buds and blue violets.

How delicious the sense of freedom when winter with its winds and snows has retreated to the poles!—when one may sit down beneath warm sunset skies, where the south wind blows softly, stirring the wet leaves and tall grass-spires, which nod their "good-even" to one another:—when a streak of yellow light skirts the north-west, while the south is draped in masses of black clouds, and the arching vault above, seeming to recede as we stretch out our eager hands toward it, is vailed by dun-brown curtains, fringed with regal purple and gold; while away to the east spread out the blue shadows, blended with dim folds of fleecy white.

On such an evening as this, I met Winnie at a great oak-tree that trailed its branches in the brook, just below the foot-bridge. Here we often sat on the huge leaning trunk, purposing to bring hither books and work, and enjoy together the long, warm mornings and cool, quiet twilights of our summer vacation; for in two weeks we were to leave Maplewood for the seminary ten miles distant.

There were so many things to be accomplished before we went, that we sat laying plans for the coming fortnight till the stars came out. We must go and see Aunt Nellie once more, and Mr. Keene's unfinished house at Maplewood village must be visited; Winnie wished so much to see where Harrie's home was to be.

Then there was the hill where so many violets grew, and the little valley full of beautiful mosses; and we must have at least two more rides together, one beyond the village, and one through the wood-road where the trees met overhead.

I had crossed the foot-bridge, and, with sun-bonnet thrown across my arm, was slowly walking homeward, watching the stars as they blossomed

"Silently one by one in the infinite meadows of heaven,"

when Winnie came running down the path, calling loudly,

"Edie, Edie, come right back this minute! Julia Arnold has come, and I'm half crazy!"

"So I see," said I; "but don't come across after

me, for I can't go back with you to-night; some other time will answer just as well."

Two days afterward, Angus came to invite me to take with him our long-anticipated sail, that had been deferred from one moon to another, till Miss Arnold should arrive.

"Emily has sent for you to come and take tea with us, and at eight o'clock we are to start; it will be a glorious night, so now be ready in two minutes," said he; but I refused to come till eight.

"I will be there punctually," I said, "and you know it is of no use to tease me; so go home and tell Emily I thank her for her invitation, but can not accept it now."

"Willful thing," said he descending the steps, "I wish I had said we did n't want you to come!"

"Then I should most certainly have staid at home."

So saying, I closed the door.

There were two reasons why I would not go with him—one was, that both Miss Arnold and the young minister Mr. Armstrong, who had arrived the week before, were strangers to me, and I dreaded formal introductions: this Angus knew, but the other I did not tell him.

At ten minutes before eight, I was ready and descending the stairs, when the bell rang. Supposing it to be Angus, I opened the door quickly, and stepped out, buttoning my gloves.

Mr. Armstrong—for it could be no one else—looked surprised, I fancied at this irregular mode of procedure—and bowed without speaking.

Ashamed for appearing so absent-minded, I began a stammering excuse, the substance of which was, that I mistook him for Angus with whom I was very well acquainted.

The stranger bowed again, then stated his errand.

Angus, it seemed, had sent him for me: they were not quite ready, and wished me to meet them at the house.

My mind was instantly made up.

Angus was determined that I should come to the parsonage; and because I had refused him, he sent a stranger.

Making an excuse to re-enter the house, I sent a light to the parlor, and left him there, while I staid in my room as long as I dared.

By the time we reached the bridge, Angus, Winnie, and Miss Arnold had passed it, and we could see them holding a consultation by the boat's side. Winnie was the first to discover us, and to present me to her friend; and in five minutes time we were gliding down the river.

Angus had not inaptly styled the night "glorious."

The heavens were all one arch of blue, studded with pale stars—the water, one sheet of reflected wavy light.

Till now, I had scarcely raised my eyes to Julia's face. Its exceeding beauty awed me, while my pulses thrilled with pleasure; and I was ready with Winnie, to render it homage. Her bonnet

had fallen backward, and masses of black hair alone, shaded her fair brow—the fairest I had ever seen.

One white round arm lay over the side of the boat, around which the bright water rippled, as we sailed down with the current.

Mr. Armstrong, and Angus, as they rested on their oars, watched her face, while Winnie was absorbed in the moonlight; this left me at liberty to scan the group.

In the young pastor's eyes, his "thoughts lay clear;" and I could see that he regarded the motionless figure before him, as a beautiful creation—a something to be admired, and wondered at, for its perfectness; but when she spoke, he turned away with an expression of disappointment that seemed almost like sorrow:—and this was repeated many times.

Angus sat carelessly regarding her, evidently criticising every feature, his countenance indicative now of partial admiration, now of undisguised contempt; changing from one to the other with various shades of each, at every position or expression of Winnie's divinity.

It was very rude of him, but as Miss Arnold was not in the least disconcerted by it, I began to think with Winnie, that her's must be an exalted nature to attain to such a state of unconsciousness.

Half a mile further down, the stream broadened; a green island-grove of pines and hemlocks, lying in the midst. Every dip of the oars, as we pro-

ceeded, broke through the surface of glittering. liquid light, seeming to let the rays down deeper, where the water was dark and still.

As we neared the narrow islet, Angus, dropping his oar, sprang upon the sandy beach; and Mr. Armstrong following, the bows of the boat were lifted upon the shore, the keel grating harshly in the sand.

"Where can Winnie be?" exclaimed Miss Arnold, with a countenance indicative of extreme anxiety, as Angus handed her from the boat.

Winnie sprang out as the boat touched the shore, and no one noticed the direction she took.

"Let us go in search of her," she continued, raising a pair of handsome, pleading eyes to his.

"Very well, I am willing, if you will go with me."

There was a peculiar expression on his face as he emphasized the last words, that explained some things I had not understood before.

We found the main path, leading nearly in a straight direction to the southern extremity of the island, and went on slowly, Angus and Miss Arnold leading the way.

The rapidity with which the last-named personage's anxiety subsided, was quite surprising; she chatted, and laughed, not loudly, it is true, but, fashionably, apparently endeavoring to render herself agreeable; which was, indeed, highly commendable, for it often happens in this imperfect state of existence, that dissimilar natures in juxtaposition, rub and jar.

But Julia's forte lay in expression—speech was altogether superfluous; and accidentally overhearing portions of the conversation, I began to feel this, very much as Mr. Armstrong had, before me.

Angus was particularly gallant, listening attentively to her many remarks, and rendering all the assistance in his power, where a rock was to be passed, or a stump avoided.

"I don't see that we are accomplishing any thing," said Mr. Armstrong, after a long silence.

"Why can't we take another path?"

We were close by another, running at right angles with this, and turning into it, soon emerged from the blended shadows, and stood on the western strand, where flat rocks extended far out into the stream, whose channel at this point was wide and shallow.

"It is just the place to look for her," and as I thus thought aloud, the sound of an oar plashing in the water, caused us both to advance a step or two, and listen.

At this moment, a boat rounded to the pebbly beach above us, and Winnie, like fair Ellen Douglas, paused

> "With head upraised, and look intent,
> And eye and ear attentive bent,
> And locks flung back and lips apart,
> Like monument of Grecian art.
> In listening mood she seemed to stand,
> The guardian Naiad of the strand."

After assuring herself, apparently, that there was

no one within hearing distance, she dropped her oar, and springing over the side of the boat, stood a moment, as if in doubt how to prevent it from floating away. First, she tried to draw it upon the shore, as Angus and Mr. Armstrong had done; but finding her strength insufficient, she re-entered it, and rowing further up the stream, where the bank descended abruptly, succeeded in fastening it to a tree, with a bit of rope that lay coiled up near the stern.

"Well done!" whispered Mr. Armstrong, as we stepped back among the trees, where we could still observe her, as cautiously advancing near the place where we had been standing, she went on from one flat rock to another, till the last was gained.

The place was beautiful enough for a mermaid's haunt; and as Winnie lay with her ear close to the bubbling water, one might have fancied her just risen from caverns under the waves, still lingering to catch the harmony of myriad voices calling her back, or glimpses of white hands beckoning pleadingly.

"I am afraid our Undine yonder, will take cold," said Mr. Armstrong, solicitously; "so, if you please, I will leave her in your care, while I go to find the rest of our party."

"Oh, Edie! do, *do* put your head down here," and Winnie rose to give me her place when she found that I was standing beside her.

"Could Poe *ever* have written 'Annabal Lee' away from the sound of such a stream?" and as I

took the place assigned me, she seated herself by my side, softly repeating:

"'It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee.
And this maiden, she lived with no other thought
Than to love, and be loved by me.

"'I was a child, and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love,
I and my Annabel Lee,
With a love that the winged seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

"'And this was the reason, that long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
And killing my Annabel Lee.

"'But our love was stronger far than the love
Of those who were older than we,
Of many far wiser than we:
But neither the angels in Heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

"'For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee,
And the stars never rise, but I see the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.
And so all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride,
In her sepulcher by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.'"

"Perhaps it was written by the side of the 'sounding sea,' Winnie; is n't there more inspiration in billows than in ripples?"

"Perhaps a wilder inspiration for those who revel in winds, and darkness, and tempest; but give me the gentler poet, who can hear spirit-voices in these ripples—whose heart grows holy under the influence of such a night as this!"

"Angus would call you sentimental."

"I am not one whit more so than he, though he will not acknowledge it."

"Oh, Winnie, how wet your dress is! and only see how the water washes up on the rock where you are sitting!

"What will Angus say? Mr. Armstrong left me to take charge of you, and we ought to have gone from here long ago. Where is your bonnet?"

"Oh! I don't know—in the boat, perhaps."

"Come, Winnie!"

"Oh, Edie, do sit down and enjoy yourself! My dress is n't very wet, and what do you suppose I care for Mr. Armstrong?"

"But I care for you, and you will certainly catch cold; besides, they will come back soon, and we must n't be seen sitting here."

"Just like you, Edie! how can you worry about every thing they will say; they have no right to dictate to you! I should die if I could never speak, nor laugh, nor breathe, without consulting other people! so as I intend to

sit here till they come, you had better do the same."

"*You* can do as you choose." I was getting quite in earnest; but suddenly remembering Winnie's peculiarities, and particularly her unwillingness to be controlled except by love, I checked the reproving words that rose to my lips, and by dint of persuasion succeeded in leading her back to the path just before Mr. Armstrong came up with Angus and Miss Arnold.

"Well, well! Miss Winnie," exclaimed her brother, "I rather think we shall have you row home for us, after giving us all this trouble! Here Miss Arnold and I have been searching for the last hour all over the island, and were about giving up in despair when Mr. Armstrong came across us."

"How terribly exhausted you do look, my poor brother!" And Winnie brought water from the brook in the hollow of her hand "to refresh him," she said.

"Where did you find them?" I asked of Mr. Armstrong, who stood quietly regarding the scene.

"On the shore where we left the boat, lamenting either its loss or ours."

"Oh! it was your loss far more than that of the boat that we regretted," interrupted Miss Arnold, speaking earnestly.

Supposing her to be jesting, I was about to reply, when a glance at her countenance assured me that she was entirely guiltless of any such in-

tention. If honesty had been an accompaniment of this obtuseness, I could have forgiven her; but when I saw her solicitous for Winnie only to gain the brother's regard, the wonderful beauty that had so thrilled me, faded, and faded, till hers seemed the most common-place face in existence.

As I turned away—for I had been intently regarding her, unconscious of having attracted attention by so doing—Angus shrugged his shoulders, and, with elevated eyebrows, hummed snatches of a song; while Mr. Armstrong, with folded arms, stood gazing down the river, looking troubled and uncomfortable.

His was a peculiarly sensitive nature, sympathizing perhaps too keenly with others. In this case he might have spared himself; for Miss Arnold never saw any glances but those of admiration, being gifted to an uncommon degree with a species of second sight that views one queen and many subjects every where.

All the way home, Winnie and Julia sang boat-songs, with full, rich choruses, the oars keeping time as they dipped below or flashed above the surface of the lake-like river.

After a time the stream grew narrower, and we landed where trees overarched it.

"And so ends our 'Midsummer Night's Dream!'" sighed Winnie.

"How queer it is of her to call this a midsummer night!" exclaimed Miss Arnold, directly addressing me for the first time.

"But the dear child is so enthusiastic," she added in a louder tone, "that her sweet thoughts manifest themselves at all times!"

"Who is it at the seminary that is so attractive?" I asked of Angus as we walked home together, leaving Mr. Armstrong to accompany Julia and Winnie.

"Miss Arnold," was the ready reply.

"But I am really in earnest, Angus, can't you tell me?"

"*I* think I am perfectly devotional in my manner toward Miss Arnold—and you 're a queer girl not to see it."

"Well, I 'll take your word for it, if you 'll tell me the name of the one there whom you *esteem*."

"I've told you once, and you did n't believe me; so select for yourself when you see them all."

VIII.

"But thou and I have shaken hands,
Till growing winters lay me low;
My paths are in the fields I know,
And thine in undiscovered lands."

TENNYSON.

IT was the evening before my leaving home, and entering upon an untried sphere of action. In one corner of the room, stood my trunk packed for the morrow's journey, with my traveling-dress folded on the cover.

Till now, I had been busy selecting "last things"—placing books in the satchel, and arranging articles that were to remain; but as twilight came on apace, I went up to my attic chamber to watch the shadows as they crept downward through the branches of the pines.

Gradually my thoughts went back to the time when I first sat in this arm-chair with one great sorrow haunting me, and filling every thought. Life was then an almost intolerable burden; but as time silently wore away the edge of my grief, I had come to cling to existence, and to look eagerly forward to its fancied joys.

Sitting thus, enveloped in the duskish shade, past scenes came thronging thickly about me, till

the present was forgotten, or reckoned anticipated future which might never be realized.

Now, in a pleasant parlor looking out upon a smooth wide lawn, I sat on my father's knee while he talked of an angel-mother beyond the skies, and said his "little Edith must be very good, and some day she would go there too."

Then I clapped my hands in delight, and said,

"Let us go *now* father—mother will be oh so glad to have us come!"

But he did not reply, and only put me down from his knee, looking so sadly all the while, that I cried after he went out thinking I was not good enough to live up above the clouds where she had gone.

Then it was winter; and as I saw playmate Willie coming up the lawn, I ran for my cloak to take another ride on his sled that always went so smoothly over the snow-drifts. But Willie had not brought his sled this time;—he was going to school a hundred miles away, and had come to bid me good-by. He looked as if he wanted to cry when he told me of this, and I was quite heart-broken for two days after he went away.

Again summer came; and with my governess I took pleasant walks along woody paths where wild flowers grew in abundance, bringing back whole handsful of soft mosses to carpet dolly's seat in the arbor, where I studied under shadow of the grape-vines, when the days were warm and clear.

So many summers and winters went by with

little change, except that as I grew older dolly was forgotten, and left on her mossy seat in the arbor, till the rain spoiled all her beauty; and I when alone made friends of books, and after a time, of two girls near my own age, whose father came to live at a beautiful place the other side of our lawn.

Then came a time when a hush pervaded every room in the house; when the servants went about noiselessly speaking in subdued tones, and I watched day and night by the sick-bed, till my father slept the "sleep that knows no waking."

There, with its lawn sloping smoothly downward to the woodland, stood the home I had called mine for many years. Was it all a dream—this thought that he had passed forever from my sight? or was he still a dweller there, awaiting his daughter's return after long months of absence?

Even now, he seemed near me—so near that I yearned to call him by name—to rend the vail separating the visible from the unseen.

Oh longing heart! he has passed forever from thy love! A silent dweller near the threshold of that home, his spirit treads in paths of "undiscovered lands."

A footstep slowly ascended the stairs—a ray of light glanced through the key-hole—and in a moment Mrs. Newell entered. As I rose from my chair, she started, and dropped her lamp, which was suddenly extinguished.

"It 's only I, Mrs. Newell," I exclaimed, quickly,

perceiving that I had frightened my good friend, who was groping in the dark to find the door.

"Why, dear Miss Edith! I might have known that no one but you would sit up here in this lonesome room, but I really thought it was a ghost! I believe I am growing nervous in my old age!"

Long after good Mrs. Newell was asleep that night, I lay thinking over my useless life, wishing I might by some noble deed redeem the past; thus planning a way of establishing a righteousness of my own.

I had yet to learn that life is made up of many sorrows, and sore trials, and petty troubles far more difficult to be borne; and that till human will is subdued, and the cross borne daily, there can be no happiness resulting from a sense of right doing.

IX.

"Sometimes at a glance thou judgest well; years could add little to thy knowledge:
When charity gloweth on the cheek, or malice is lowering in the eye."
PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY.

THE summer term of the seminary commenced a week before our leaving home; and as we arrived in school hours, there was abundance of time in which to unpack our trunks, before Winnie's friends knew that she was in the house. As we were unfolding our dresses, and sorting out school-books, Mrs. Talcott came up from the school-room, and stood for a moment after the introduction to inquire after Winnie's father and brother, then quietly glided away.

"How do you like her?" asked Winnie, closing the door.

"Not very well just now: perhaps I shall change my mind after seeing more of her."

Winnie laughed.

"There is n't very much of her, to be sure; but you will love her little self as well as I do before long."

"She is too dignified and precise, somehow, for her size; and that is much too small for a teacher."

'Oh! is that all?"

At this moment a dozen feet came tramping up stairs, and a voice at the door called out,

"Winnie Holmes, I want to see you!"

"Come in, then," was the reply.

"I can't," said the voice at the keyhole; "it's against the rules this term."

Forthwith Winnie jumped up, scattering a lapful of books and papers she was arranging, and I saw nothing more of her for the next half hour.

In the hall, many voices clamored, blending in perfect jargon. "Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia," could scarcely have excelled these in variety of sound. At intervals, short and few though they were, I could distinguish Miss Arnold's voice, and hoped in my heart that her love for Angus Holmes' sister was as sincere as her words seemed to express.

"Young ladies!" said a voice from the stairs, and the silence that succeeded was complete as it was instantaneous, "I wish you all to go to your own rooms."

In a moment, half a dozen doors opened and closed again; and in the stillness I heard Winnie, with her hand on the knob of ours, asking if Miss Arnold and Miss Russell could come into her room for a few moments.

The reply did not reach my ears; but in a moment she came in, followed by the queenly figure of Miss Arnold, who gave me a cold hand and a

condescending smile, immediately appropriating the only unoccupied chair in the room.

"This is Kittie Russell, Edie," said Winnie, unceremoniously bringing forward a young girl who had entered in Miss Arnold's shadow.

Kittie extended her hand shyly, stealing quick glances at me from under her long lashes, then retreated to the other side of Winnie, who, seating herself on the bed, made numerous inquiries after Grey and Jessie, who had not yet returned.

Miss Arnold told all she knew about them, which was very little, and Kittie seemed to have taken upon herself a vow of silence; but Winnie, who never allowed conversation to flag, found out all the new rules, the studies each one had taken, what lectures they were to attend, and whether they had had a reception-evening yet; till at length, Miss Arnold excused herself on the plea of having a composition to write, and left Kittie alone with us.

At first, she sat very still, watching Winnie as she gathered up her scattered books and placed them in a desk by the window, then suddenly rose, and taking the chair Miss Arnold had left, seated herself in it, near our industrious friend, to whom she spoke in a low tone, evidently laboring under great restraint.

But as I busied myself with my dresses in the closet, passing back and forth to my trunk in the middle of the room, Kittie began to converse more freely; till before the tea-bell rang, I was laughing

with Winnie at her ludicrous descriptions, and humorous remarks.

As we sat at the long table in the dining-room, curious eyes met mine in every direction; some glancing covertly, some with unflinching boldness.

Winnie was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Talcott, when the door opened, and a slender, lame girl entered, passing along to a seat opposite mine, at the further end of the table.

"How do you do, Emmy?" exclaimed Winnie, rising as soon as she perceived her, and warmly grasping the thin fingers that lay passive in her hand.

"Very well," was the curt reply; and Winnie resumed her conversation with Mrs. Talcott.

This then, must be the Emily Arnold, of whom I had heard. What a pity that she should be so lame! But she need not be so uncourteous in her manners too! I judged her from those two coldly spoken words.

After tea, we overtook her in the hall, and Winnie detaining her to introduce me, asked pleasantly,

"Where were you, Emmy, when I was talking with the other girls this afternoon?"

"In my room," was the brief reply.

"But did n't you care about seeing me?"

"There were plenty of others who wanted to see you more."

"Oh Emmy! you think ever so much of me, if you would only acknowledge it!"

"Please let me go!" and the lame girl impatiently shook off the friendly hand that lay on her shoulder.

"Just what you might expect from that cross thing!" said a tall, brilliant-looking girl who stood listening to the conversation. "I have learned to let her alone!"

"I wonder if you would n't be cross, Miss Hayward," said Kittie Russell, passing us, "if you were slighted, and not only that, but taunted from morning till night, as she has been?"

The one thus addressed smiled contemptuously as Kittie ran up stairs to find the wayward girl, who submitted to no influence but hers.

"Now, Emmy dear," we heard Kittie saying, as we passed their half-opened door, "do go and speak to Winnie and her friend. I love you, and so they all would, except that hateful Louise Hayward, if you would only let them."

But Emily sat with her face buried in the bedclothes; and as we went on to our room we heard nothing more of the conversation.

The next morning, seated side by side at our desks in the school-room, Winnie and I studied the same lessons, glancing now and then through the open window at the large garden beyond, bright with summer flowers of every hue.

There was an arbor at the further extremity, that reminded me of the grape-vines, and dolly, and the soft mosses at that dear old home; and so wandering back into the past as I had often done

before, present duties were forgotten till classes were called to the recitation-rooms.

But Mrs. Talcott in a kindly manner excused my imperfect lesson, and, as Winnie had predicted, my heart began to warm toward our little teacher.

Inwardly resolving to live henceforth in the present, the minutes passed too quickly, and the hour for dismissal came before I was prepared for it.

It was composition-day; and each one, as she entered the school-room after dinner, placed her folded sheet on Mrs. Talcott's desk.

The first read was Kittie Russell's:—sparkling, original, and brief, like herself. Then came Miss Arnold's; and I blushed for her, at the flimsy, wordy, meaningless thing she had offered. It was beneath criticism; and Mrs. Talcott laid it aside without comment.

Afterward followed several others, possessing much merit, but no particular interest for me, unacquainted as I was with the writers.

Emily Arnold's had been reserved till the last; and, as Mrs. Talcott read, I marveled that the cold, sullen cripple could find such words with which to clothe the weird fancies of her brain.

Throughout the whole, an invincible power held the listener with an iron hand; forcing the conviction that upon perishable paper a master-spirit had stamped itself—a spirit whose essence was superior to decay.

Involuntarily my eyes sought the pale, pinched

features of the cripple; but so hidden from the world was that inner life, with its deep fountains of joy, that one might not guess its existence by any outward token.

"As this is reception-evening," said Mrs. Talcott, rising, "the young ladies will now prepare their lessons for to-morrow. I shall appoint no monitress for this hour," she continued, "as I trust each one with a high sense of responsibility will shape her course of conduct as conscience may direct; remembering that an Unseen Presence is here, and that for every wasted moment an account must be rendered."

As she passed out of the room, Miss Hayward rose, and seated herself by the vacant desk.

"Young ladies," she began, in successful imitation of Mrs. Talcott's tone and manner, "as this is reception-evening, you will, as soon as your books are laid aside, proceed to adorn yourselves in your usual becoming manner, as conscience will direct. We are expecting several eligible gentlemen to grace our parlors with their visible presence; one of whom, in pursuance of a course of medicine, has made many and laudable attempts to bind with sundry silken cords the unwilling affections of one in our midst, whose name can not be mentioned with impunity."

Here she glanced at Emily; and Kittie, who was sitting beside her, understanding the allusion coupled with an expression of scorn, sprang to her feet.

"Miss Hayward," she exclaimed, firmly, with flashing eyes, whose glance was returned by one of indifference, "if you say another word, I shall inform Mrs. Talcott!"

"Do, if you please, dear; and will you, at the same time, be so good as to present my compliments, and say that her presence would be highly desirable?"

Before the last word was uttered, Kittie dashed impulsively from the room. Miss Hayward retained her seat, until, after a lapse of several moments, in which all studied silently, Mrs. Talcott returned with Kittie, remaining at the desk without speaking till the close of study-hour.

"The young ladies, with the exception of Miss Hayward and Miss Russell, can be excused," she said, as the clock struck five; and we passed out in silence, escaping speedily to the upper hall, and thence to our several rooms. Three or four, however, paused near the attic stairs, conversing in low, mysterious tones, till the ringing of the tea-bell, an hour afterward, sent them in different directions to dispose of books and slates, and to arrange disordered locks.

On our way to the dining-room we met Kittie, just coming from the school-room, who, with very wet lashes, and a sob in her voice, detained Winnie a moment on the stairs.

The hour next succeeding was a quiet, though very busy one. In the several rooms, blinds were thrown wide open, curtains looped far back, and

mirrors so adjusted as to catch every ray of light. Across the beds, or on adjoining chairs, lay dresses, and ribbons, and immaculate collars. School-books lay on school-aprons, and cords and tassels dangled over little gaiters with tangled strings, and slippers, standing in pairs beside the bed, were displaced by impatient hands or hurrying feet.

Miss Arnold, with two or three others of the older ones, made an early toilet, and descended to the parlor, whence through the carefully-closed doors, some strains of a new duet or difficult instrumental piece floated through the halls, till suddenly silenced by the first ringing of the bell. Above stairs, curious eyes peered over the bannisters, and listeners in double-gowns ceased their whispered consultations, and held their breath to catch the name, or tone of voice, as Bridget opened the door.

Presently we heard her busy feet ascending the stairs, and Winnie rushed out into the hall.

"Miss Brewster and Miss Holmes are wanting below," she said, as she saw Winnie's expectant face.

"Who is it, Bridget?"

"A gentleman who has n't been here latterly, Miss; he would n't give me his name."

"It 's Gus, of course!" exclaimed Winnie, rushing in after me.

"Come, quick, Edie, before all the others go down!"

So saying, she half dragged me to the door, and

ran down first, while I followed more leisurely, assured of the correctness of her supposition by the joyous sounds proceeding from the parlor.

"Where is Miss Arnold?" Angus asked, after a long conversation with us, who, although we had been absent from home but two days, had very much to say.

"She and Miss Shelton were practicing duets when you came," said Winnie. "Shall I call them both?"

"If you please."

Away she went, through the back parlor, and across the hall to the school-room, and in two or three minutes we heard her ascending the stairs.

The Miss Shelton of whom she spoke had attracted me at first by the gentleness of her demeanor, and the sincerity of her heart, shining through every action, and word, and expression. I saw afterward that among strangers she usually passed unnoticed, and that those who loved her best never called her beautiful; but to me her face seemed holy—it was one that brought tears to my eyes as I gazed on it.

Had I then known that she was a Christian—sinful by nature, and frail as we all, yet sanctified by grace—there would have been a "great gulf" between us, and I should never have dared to become intimate with her. But I thought hers only a noble nature, and tried to elevate my own to it; checking resentful feelings, and cultivating kindly ones, yet failing to accomplish what I most de-

sired. I had yet to learn that my own strength was weakness.

Winnie came suddenly tripping into the room with her two friends, while I was describing to Angus the one he had never seen.

On a low ottoman in the back parlor sat Emily Arnold, near her best friend, Kittie; but so silently were they conversing, that for a long time no one seemed aware of their presence.

"Will you sing for me, Miss Arnold?" asked Angus, glancing toward the open piano, from which Julia, in her hasty flight, had forgotten to remove her music.

"I am quite out of practice," was the would-be timid answer.

"I thought I heard the piano as I came in," said Angus, carelessly.

"It might have been some of the younger scholars," was the unblushing reply.

Julia played elegantly, but would never acknowledge that she spent any time in practicing. She evidently expected Angus to make a second request—it was her habit to yield gracefully when thus solicited; but I knew the one she had to deal with far better than she, and was not, like her, surprised when he turned to Miss Shelton, who seemed deeply pained at Julia's falsehood, so complaisantly uttered.

As she seated herself at the piano without hesitation, I noticed that her fingers trembled in running over the keys, and there was a slight quivering

in her voice when she commenced the song before her; but the momentary embarrassment passed off, and she sang several pieces, at Angus' request, in a soft, musical voice, while Julia sat nervously tapping her delicately-slippered foot on the carpet.

She had lost a fine opportunity for displaying her powers that evening.

Soon other callers entered, and Augus left us, and passed from one to another among the different groups scattered about the room. At almost every turn he encountered Mrs. Talcott, with whom he appeared to be a favorite; and her usual precision seemed to vanish when engaged in conversation with him.

As we were thus left alone for a few moments, Winnie told me of Kittie's penitent acknowledgment on the stairs.

"She is so changed since last summer!" Winnie began.

"Then, she did so love to tease the girls—and when Mrs. Talcott reproved her she would be very angry; but now she is so much gentler, and really seems trying to control her temper. She says she knew it was wrong to take any notice of what Louise Hayward said—though she *is* a provoking girl!—and that she meant to ask her forgiveness for being so hasty; and that is n't Kit Russell at all! She must have taken lessons of Mary Shelton a long time to reach such a degree of perfection! But where are Louise and Kittie?" she asked,

looking about the room; "I have n't seen them this evening."

"Miss Hayward has not yet made her appearance," I answered, "but Kittie is sitting in the back parlor, where she has been a long time."

"Let 's go and talk with them," said Winnie, rising. "The gentleman in this room are so dull, it makes me sleepy to look at them."

Accordingly we went through into the back parlor, where, near the low ottoman, Angus sat, so engaged in conversation with Emily, that he was not aware of our presence till Winnie laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Ah, Emmy! naughty girl!" she said; "why could n't you take some of those stupid ones, and leave us our brother?"

But Emily's animation all passed away as we entered, leaving only the old, sullen mood, that seldom vented itself in words; so Kittie answered for her.

"Was n't he, too, stupid till he came here? Let us exert our powers over him a little while longer, then you can take him, and send us another."

Promising to make a wise selection, we left them, and passed through the hall to the front door. It was a dark evening, but the stars were bright; and we stood a long time by the great pillars of the piazza, watching them as they twinkled afar off, seeming more and more distant the longer we gazed. Silently we each acknowledged

the gentle influence of the night, feeling a sense of liberty in the free air, where kindred spirits need not speak in order to hold intercourse.

Within, Julia played and sang bewitchingly to two or three entranced admirers; but the one she sought most to please was so absorbed in conversation with her crippled, despised sister, that his favorite songs failed to draw from him an admiring smile or a word of praise.

As the evening advanced, the callers one by one took their leave, Angus remaining till the last.

I bade him good-night, and, as Winnie had some last words to say, lingered, waiting for her at the head of the stairs. Standing thus in the darkness —for the hall lamp had been extinguished—I heard the school-room door open and close again; and two figures, conversing in low tones, slowly ascended the stair-case, passing close by without perceiving me. The first voice, which I recognized as Miss Hayward's, inquired,

"Was he particularly attentive to Em this evening?"

"Yes!"—I knew Julia Arnold's tone at once—"he thinks to tease me by appearing devoted to her."

"Then you have actually refused him, Jule?"

"Of course I have! I was at their house this vacation, and found out all about them. His father is a poor, feeble, old minister; and even if he should die soon, his possessions would n't be of vast benefit to his children!"

I had heard enough! My face burned with indignation; but I kept my stand till they entered their room, thinking whether or not it would be best to tell Winnie of the conversation. If they had been aware of my presence, I should not have hesitated to confront Julia, and accuse her of falsehood; but as it was, I prudently determined to say nothing at present. Miss Hayward, contrary to Julia's expectation, kept the secret; and, after a week or two, my wrath in a measure effervesced.

X.

"O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away."

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

ON pleasant days, we took long walks after school, Mrs. Talcott usually accompanying us. Sometimes we passed through narrow lanes and dusty back-streets, where noisy children made arithmetical calculations on our numbers, to a lonely road that stretched before us, without curve, or angle the most obtuse, as far as the eye could reach, to fields, and gardens, and cottages, and innumerable things beyond, beheld in imagination, which alone traversed the distance, too great for the most indefatigable feet.

Sometimes we visited botanical gardens, and came home laden with spoil for the morrow's analysis; or climbed the steep hill in the suburbs of the city, to gather the treasures of sweet wild-flowers growing along its sides.

This afternoon, a sudden shower had left unpaved walks muddy: so our course lay through quiet, pleasant streets near the heart of the city, where old mansions, dark with evergreen shadows

and damp with mold, retreated in antiquated pride from the bright, brick tenements, springing up every where about them, like fabled monsters, in a night.

From one of these ancient buildings a tall man emerged suddenly, and coming down the path bordered on either side with rank rows of box, opened the gate just as Winnie and I passed it.

Turning into a narrow street in order to avoid a class of medical students who were coming from recitation, this same tall man appeared on the opposite side of the way; and as we were entering the seminary grounds, he met us, respectfully lifting his hat to Mrs. Talcott, who returned the salutation with dignified coldness.

"That gentleman appears to take particular interest in Mrs. Talcott; do you know him?" I inquired of Winnie, who hesitated, then answered, evasively,

"It is some one who has called here once, I think—yes—it was some time ago—quite a long time. Some of Mrs. Talcott's friends introduced him, I believe."

"A palliating circumstance, surely!" I said. "Can't you frame another excuse for him?"

"Ridiculous, Edie! as if you thought I knew or cared any thing about that man!" said Winnie, in a petulant tone, that revealed to me quite clearly her present state of mind.

"Why have n't you told me before? I really

had n't the slightest idea of any thing of the sort till just now."

"Told you what? I don't know what I 've done to make you tease me in this way!"

"Now, Winnie, don't get angry—let me explain.

"I asked you first the name of a certain gentleman—a stranger to me, whom we accidentally met in the street; and thereupon you proceeded to make a most uncalled-for disclosure, that, as a matter of course, led me to inquire why I had not been informed on certain points before. Then—"

"Stop, stop, Edie! When we get to our room you may ask as many questions as you please, and I 'll promise to answer them all, dutifully; but," Winnie added, in a whisper, "Mrs. Talcott may overhear us now, and call us to account."

This was an entirely groundless supposition, as Mrs. Talcott and all the scholars had left us standing at the foot of the stairs: moreover, we could not, by any possible construction, be accused of conspiracy against the interests of any person or persons; but as a quietus to Winnie's fears, I held my peace till protected by the four walls of our own room, which she reached first.

"A letter from home!" she eagerly exclaimed, tearing open a small white envelope that lay on the bureau.

"It is from Emily—to both of us: shall I read it aloud?"

"Not till after tea; the bell is ringing now,"

said I, laying aside my bonnet, and opening the door.

"Oh, Edie, don't go yet! wait!" And she caught my dress, with such a look and tone of distress, that I inquired,

"What is the matter? Has Emily written any thing so alarming?"

"No, no; but I want to read it now. If you will go, do ask Mrs. Talcott to excuse me!"

"I shall do no such thing! If you are a sensible girl, put the letter in your pocket, and come down to tea before you get a dilatory mark."

I did not wait to see whether she was angry or not; but pulling my dress from her grasp, went on to the dining-room, wondering how she could be so childish! I used rather to pride myself on my power of self-control; and it was to me a matter of surprise that all could not command themselves when they chose. Perhaps I forgot where I failed: as it was, I often made myself miserable in vain attempts to conform others to my standard; making very slight allowance, if any, for peculiarities of temperament and disposition, varying widely both by nature and education. I forgot, too—or, perhaps, did not choose to remember—that Winnie, though nearly as old as I, was the youngest of the family;—of delicate physical organization, and rapidly-developing mental faculties;—petted by all the household;—watched over and guarded to an extent that precluded necessity for strict self-watchfulness.

Therefore, when left to herself, it was no wonder that she often seemed lacking in many of the essentials of a well-formed character. Quick to take offense at hastily spoken words, she was also quick in asking forgiveness, and in grieving over her many faults: while to me, from childhood left much to myself, naturally willful, and possessing no degree of passiveness, it had never occurred that there could be any virtue in overlooking faults in others that I had not the power to correct; and to ask pardon for errors or misdemeanors formed no part of my creed.

After tea, Winnie, who had taken my advice, came running up stairs behind me.

"Let 's go out to the arbor," she said; "it 's so warm here I can't read my letter aloud."

"You can read it to yourself, then!" I answered, surlily; for there was a disposition on my part to manifest displeasure at her former childishness.

"Very well!" said Winnie; and shutting the door in an unmistakable manner, she went to the arbor alone; while I punished myself far more than any one else, by determining not to read the letter immediately, when she should bring it to me, as I had no doubt she would.

Nor was I disappointed; for in a few minutes she returned, and laying the coveted sheet in my lap, penitently asked me to forget that she had been so naughty. But a something—perhaps it was conscience—told me that she was not the only one who had need to ask forgiveness for past of-

fenses; and a something that was *not* conscience rose up against self-abasement. So I answered to the effect that, though the person toward whom an error had been committed might overlook it, it was not always best for the offender to do so: which, in the abstract, might have been considered passable logic, and had better have been reserved for some more important occasion.

But as my little room-mate's grief was genuine, and her tears none of the crocodile order, I began to be ashamed of my captiousness; and, still without any acknowledgments, endeavored to dispense with my irritable mood.

Winnie's face soon brightened up, as summer skies after a shower; and in the course of the evening, I so far yielded to its influence as to request her to read me the home-letter, which ran as follows:

"DEAR GIRLS:—

"If it were my habit to indulge in extem pore outbreaks, like a dearly-beloved young sis ter of mine, my letter to you, instead of commencing and continuing in an orthodox manner, would be one jubilant shout from beginning to end—'Harrie has come!' And now, if I should stop to tell you how I have been afflicted with neuralgia, and how poor Mr. Armstrong has for two days past been suffering with a nervous headache, which Angus, with all his skill (?), has only made worse—instead of pausing to commiser-

ate with us, you would only glance over the lines till you came to those treating of Harriet's arrival: forgetting, thenceforward, that there was such a thing in existence as 'suffering humanity.' (This sentence is particularly intended for Winnie.)

"Well, then, to begin at the beginning:—last Tuesday afternoon, as Mr. Armstrong sat writing at his study-table, which, in consideration of my forlorn state, he has brought down stairs and placed by the south window of the sitting-room—his train of thought, which I had taken particular care not to interrupt, was broken by the sudden appearance of a gentleman and lady coming directly toward the side door, which the lady entered just as Harrie Clinton used to, years ago. I said, 'Harrie!' and she said, 'Emily!' and I believe we both shed some quiet tears before I thought to introduce Mr. Armstrong (who, by the way, had slipped unperceived out of the room), or to ask her husband in. He had been back to the carriage while we stood talking, and now came in, bringing in his arms a dear baby—Eddie, they call him—who was to remain with us while his father and nurse went to their house with the trunks.

"I could scarcely form an opinion of Mr. Keene in the very short time he was here, so you need n't expect a description of either him or Harrie; neither can I tell you what we said all that afternoon, sitting part of the time with father and Gus, and much of the time alone; for father's physician will only allow him to converse at intervals.

"The little Eddie toddled about the room, making famous discoveries in the old kitchen, when the door was by accident left open. His ways are very engaging, and he repeats many little words after his mother very prettily.

"She taught him, in the course of the afternoon, to say 'Aunt Emmy,' and 'Uncle Gussie,' and 'grandpa;' and his childish pronunciation amused father very much.

"'Dranpa, dranpa,' he would say, pulling his hand, 'come with Eddie—*do* come!' and it seemed a mystery to him why father could not run about the room after him, like Gus. Mr. Armstrong, who had taken his sermon up stairs, did not make his appearance till tea-time, and as the carriage came soon afterward, Harrie saw very little of him. She noticed his eyes, though, as almost every one does: for she told me afterward that she thought they had a very spiritual expression.

"Angus and I went with her to the village: she wished us to see her husband and home; and we had not yet said half we wanted to. We passed Mrs. Wesson's house, which, she says, looks precisely as it did ten years ago; and Aunt Nellie's, which seems as crazy as herself, with the gate swung wide open, and several of the shutters hanging by one hinge. Harrie spoke of stopping there, to see if poor Nellie would recognize her; but, as it was growing late, we decided to wait till another time. She mourned over the new bridge (the one near the village), it was so high, and

modern-looking, she said; but father's old church was the same reminder of the fourth commandment, notwithstanding the changes in its surroundings. They are grading the hill north of Mr. Keene's, to cut a new road; so we had to go around by the old steep one. You have been there, so I need n't describe the hill, with its background of grand old forest-trees; but the site struck me as being peculiarly beautiful. There are already white wreath-roses twining around the piazza pillars, and the garden hedge is growing nicely. Within, the house is furnished with tasteful elegance; there seems nothing lacking—nothing left to desire. Mr. Keene appeared pleased with my approval of his taste;—for he came here several weeks ago to superintend the arrangements, leaving Harrie with her aunt at the South.

"He glanced often at his wife as we went from room to room, and, I thought, seemed a little disappointed because she said so little—but it is her way; I presume she liked it all very much.

"Little Eddie was so sleepy, that Alice, his nurse, took him from the carriage before we alighted; and as he did not go about the house with us, I saw nothing more of him that night; but Mr. Armstrong and I have called since, and Eddie was so attracted toward him, and found out so soon that he loved little children, that he cried when we came away.

"Our minister's people, and especially the children of his congregation, seem to love him very

much; but I have told you such a long story about Harrie, that I can not possibly stop to write his praises.

"Father's health has not been quite so good as usual, since the warm weather commenced; but he is very cheerful, and says he may be stronger in the autumn.

"He seems to have no desire to live longer than his Heavenly Father pleases—indeed, I think sometimes that he would pray to be released from this state of suffering, did he not think that in patient endurance and perfect submission he is fulfilling his Master's will.

"If his health is better in the fall, Angus will finish his medical course; but at present, we can not persuade him to leave home.

"Your letters are very welcome—I can always find leisure to read them three or four times over.

"Mr. Armstrong, who has come back to his study-table since Harrie left, modestly sends his regards to my 'sister and her friend'—Gus calls out from the piazza that he 'can't waste love on a couple of unappreciating juveniles;' and father, in whose room I have just been placing a vase of roses, says,

"'Tell my dear daughters I love them very much; but there is One who loves them better than I.'

"With very much affection,

"Your 'motherly EMMY.'"

XI.

THE summer months passed rapidly; and remembering that at the beginning of the next term, Botany, Rhetoric, and French would be laid aside for Chemistry, Euclid, and Latin, we studied faithfully, and passed a satisfactory examination.

Mary Shelton had frequently been permitted to study in our room; and her example so inspired me through all the long, sultry July days, that my progress in many things was chiefly attributable to her.

Winnie needed no stimulus. Ambitious as ever, she gave herself no rest, mourning over the violent headaches, consequent on over-exertion, that often interrupted her in the midst of self-imposed tasks.

The tall stranger—Adrian Lee, his name was—called often on reception evenings; and although seldom conversing with Winnie alone, his presence seemed to exert a powerful influence over her.

Professedly frank and open-hearted, he was too deep for me: there was an air of mystery about him that repelled me, while it attracted my dear little friend. No one knew any thing of him but what he himself chose to tell.

An acquaintance of Mrs. Talcott's, meeting him often in society, became interested in his engaging manners and cultivated intellect, and had no hesitation in introducing him at the seminary when he expressed a desire to accompany him there. That he was fascinating, no one could deny; nor was Winnie the only one who felt, without acknowledging it, an interest in the handsome stranger.

With many, it was merely the interest of curiosity; but with her, it was something widely differing from this.

Mrs. Talcott, in her manner toward Lee, was coldly polite; and he, perceiving this, called less frequently than at first. In his absence, Winnie grew thoughtful and sedate; so unlike the careless child of old, that it troubled me beyond measure.

As we sat studying together one evening, I inquired, suddenly,

"How old is Lee?"

At this mention of his name, she started, and the color rose rapidly to her cheeks; but I continued writing my French exercise, without apparently noticing it.

"About thirty, I think," she answered, hesitatingly.

"You love him, Winnie—it is useless to deny it; but he is too old—too well skilled in the arts of society for you."

Quick as thought, she came and sat beside me, hiding her face on my shoulder.

"Edie," she began, in a tremulous voice, "I

could n't tell any one but you—not even Emmy—but I do love him! What shall I do?"

"Conquer it! I do not like the man. He is not all he seems to be."

"But you do not know him;—he is very noble. You would love him, if—"

"If what?"

"If you knew him as well as I. I have done wrong, Edie, I know I have;"—she spoke rapidly, and with an attempt at self-control—"but since I have commenced, you shall know the whole. You remember Mrs. Talcott used often to let me call on an old friend in S—— street?"

"Yes. And he always accompanied you?"

"Not *always*, Edie, but often."

"You should tell your father and Emily of this."

"Don't speak of it! I can not, I can *not!* but I will try to forget him."

There was such sincere regret in her words, and especially in her tone and manner, that, after telling her how much anxiety it had caused me, I assured her that neither Mrs. Talcott nor any one else should ever know it from me, if she would try to forget him, as she again and again, with many tears, promised to do.

Not many days afterward, a letter came from Emily, inclosing a note from her father, portions of which Winnie showed to me. It was full of wise, fatherly counsel; and in conclusion he entreated—

"Think much and seriously of the *present*, my beloved daughter. Its value you can not realize now; but if these precious, fleeting moments are misimproved, you must some day mourn over your folly with unavailing tears. You have been a child of many prayers; and I have endeavored to impress on you the importance of early 'laying up treasure in heaven.'

"But I am fearful, lest while you observe outward forms, the religion of the heart may be lacking.

"Do not pray merely because you have been taught to do so. Go to Christ feeling your need of regeneration; and if you have no desire to love him better than you have heretofore, you may be very sure that your heart is not right in his sight. Till you have obtained acceptance with Christ, the world has no true happiness for you, and you are not fulfilling the aim and object of your being."

The end of the summer term came, and with it examination-day: then we were all to be separated for six weeks. Julia Arnold and Louise Hayward alone were not to return; and few felt, though several expressed much sorrow.

The examination occupied the whole of the morning: then we went lingeringly down to a late dinner, and then the stage came for Winnie and me.

The scholars thronged about us, and Julia, ac-

companying Winnie to the gate, exacted from her a promise to spend at least two weeks of the vacation with her. As she extended her hand to me, coldly, as usual—for we could never be passably friendly—I took occasion to say,

"Mr. Holmes ought to be very grateful to you for loving his sister so well. You were wise in refusing him, however, for the father's possessions will never be of great benefit to his children."

I spoke rapidly, and followed Winnie into the stage before she had time to wonder what we were talking about. Julia was pale with anger, but tried to answer Winnie's cheerful good-by, as she put her head out of the window, nodding and smiling to the group on the steps.

There was a kind of malicious satisfaction in the thought that I had probably made a life-long enemy of one whose character I could not but detest; yet after all, the pleasure arising from the consciousness of such a deed is of brief duration.

"I don't like Julia as well as I used to," Winnie remarked, in a half-thoughtful, half-indifferent way, as the stage rumbled out of the narrow streets, and took the broad, pleasant road toward Maplewood.

I made no reply, for I knew that there was something on her mind, and she evidently wished for some excuse to unburthen it.

"Did you ever think her hypocritical?" she again began, after a long silence.

It was not a very difficult question for me to

answer, but I preferred giving her an opportunity for expressing her opinion first: and so I inquired why she asked me such a question.

"Because—" she answered, hesitatingly, "because I was thinking she once told Gus a—"

"A lie?" I suggested, as she seemed puzzled for a word.

"Well, it seems rather a hard accusation, but I suppose it was nothing more nor less."

"Then why not say 'lie' at once?"

"You know the 'truth is n't to be spoken at all times.'"

"Don't quote Julia Arnold's maxims to me!"

"I believe you hate her, Edith!"

"I believe I don't love her any too well."

"You have a most unmistakable way of evincing your likes and dislikes!"

"Have you any fault to find with it?"

"No, not so long as you and I are good friends, and I believe we shall be for some time yet, in spite of all your scoldings."

"I have another one in reserve for you."

"What have I done now?"

"Only a very slight thing! Who was it that promised to make Julia Arnold a long visit this vacation?"

"Well, Mademoiselle Monitress, what if the offender were I?"

"Then 'I' is a weak, silly thing!"

"'I' is n't!"

"'I' is! You know just as well as I that you

would have preferred to visit Mary Shelton with me, instead, if you had dared say so!"

"If I had dared?"

"Yes; you know you are afraid of Julia, insignificant as she is!"

"Well, Edie, how could I refuse?"

"How could you? Why, just as easily as you could accept."

"But she would have been offended."

"Pshaw!"

"You do have the most summary way with you, Edie Brewster!"

"Well, it vexes me to see you led about by that girl, contrary to your own judgment;—I am not speaking of this thing in particular, now, but of many others:—making sacrifices to obtain her favor, which is worse than none when you get it, and doing various things which no one else would require, and no one but you perform.

"But she knows that you are a good-natured little thing, and has sense enough to see that it is for her interest to be particularly friendly to you; and you believe all her protestations, and, I suppose, think she will make a magnificent sister-in-law one of these days!"

"Have you, then, seriously thought of such a thing?"

"Have I? If I have, it is because I place a very low estimate on your brother Gus! I should think you would scorn the idea!"

"But if he loves her—even though she may not be—"

"What in the name of common sense has driven you to such a belief as that?"

"She is handsome, and he adores beauty."

"And, as a natural consequence, must marry every handsome painting or beautiful statue he may chance to come across!"

"Oh, be still, Edie! I 'm tired of quarreling about him, he is n't worth it! Besides, we shall be at home in about an hour, and it will take me all that time to get the cross wrinkles out of my face!"

"And in an hour's time I must resign you into Emily's hands, and give up my authority; so you see I wish to exercise it as much as possible."

"What will you do all this long vacation?"

"Enjoy myself moderately, I suppose, without troubling my head about your misdemeanors."

"But how very lonely you will be without me."

"As if I cared any thing for your society!"

"You could n't possibly dispense with it!"

"I 'm inclined to think I shall have to, in those two weeks you will spend with Julia Arnold."

"Don't let 's talk about that;—perhaps I shall not go, after all; but did Mary really wish to have me visit her with you?"

"To be sure! she never says any thing she does n't mean."

"Edie," (Winnie had been wholly absorbed in

her own thoughts for a minute or two), "I've just thought of something!"

"Is it possible!"

"Mary has a very handsome brother."

"I can't help that."

"I am afraid you will find, some of these days, that there is something else you can't help—namely, falling in love with him!"

"Ridiculous!"

"I 'll not say another word to you, till you 'll talk to me!" So saying, Winnie closed her lips determinately, and for two or three minutes we rode in silence.

Soon the stage stopped before a small, white house, and a young woman with a baby in her arms came from within, stooping to kiss a brown-cheeked boy, who was playing in the sand by the gate. The baby clung so closely to its mother, that Winnie, who loved all such little ones, could not, in some time, catch a glimpse of its face. Presently a tiny hand and arm, white and beautiful, stole from beneath the thin shawl enveloping them, and a pair of soft, brown eyes appeared, shaded by a muslin sun-bonnet.

"What beautiful eyes your baby has!" said Winnie, addressing the mother, who seemed pleased with the attention her little one attracted.

"They are useless ones, Miss;" and she instinctively drew the hapless one nearer her as she spoke.

"Not blind! you do not mean that that dear

baby is blind!" exclaimed Winnie, leaning toward it, and taking the little soft hand in hers.

I never loved children indiscriminately, going into ecstasies over little expressionless objects with undeveloped faculties and bald heads;—but this one was blind! living in another world from ours: a world where the ideal is beyond our comprehension—very beautiful, it may be, but unlike any thing we ever dreamed of: and so when attracted by Winnie's gentle voice, it at length suffered her to take it in her arms, and she talked to it in simple baby-language, I tried to think of something to amuse it, placing my fan in its hand, and laying in its lap two or three other articles which I happened to have about me. But baby soon found, as all babies will when such is the fact, that we neither understood nor appreciated each other; so, after one more pitying glance at its beautiful eyes, I left it to Winnie, and studied the trees instead; trying to recall their various names that Angus had so many times taught me, and I had as often forgotten.

Oaks and maples were easily remembered; but there were others, and more slender ones, whose distinguishing characteristics invariably puzzled me.

Now we were on a high hill, from which I could just distinguish Mr. Keene's house, and the grove, and through an opening in the trees, I caught a glimpse of busy Maplewood below, with its shining brook, and tin-roofed factories glittering in the sun.

Then we descended, down—down—among the woods, where the birds chirped and sang all the day long, and lithe squirrels darted along the crooked fences, peering with bright eyes from some fastness in the trunk of a giant oak, or disappearing among the limbs as we passed. Now the bridge was just before us, and the path to the parsonage wound through the trees on the left. Winnie kissed the sightless baby as she gave it back to its mother, and I left the stage with her, giving the driver directions about my trunk.

Angus met us with open arms as we came flying down the path; and Emily, with a quiet kiss for each, told us, without words, how glad she was to see us. Then we went together to "father's room," and sat with him a very few minutes. Mr. Armstrong left his sermon, and came down stairs to shake hands with us, and in the midst of one of Winnie's long speeches, I took my leave and started for home by the way of the foot-bridge.

The woods were darker than when I last saw them, and the tall trees nearly shaded the bridge, leaving a spot for the sunlight in the center.

Mrs. Newell shook hands with me cordially, and asked me directly to my grandmother's room. She had not changed with the season, but wore the same wintery face that met me in this same wintery room, many months since. Now, however, she welcomed me in a less stately manner than then; I even fancied she was glad to see me, if such a thing as gladness might be supposed to enter the guarded portals

of her heart; but it was merely from her manner that I judged—there was no change in the expression of her face.

For two or three days following, I saw much of my friends at the parsonage. Emily came with Angus and Winnie two evenings in succession, and I went back and forth a dozen times. Mr. Armstrong, too, came over one afternoon with Winnie, and we went to Aunt Nellie's, and to the walnut-grove beyond, where, he said, he sometimes studied. Then he showed us his pulpit—a stump, far back in the grove—where he preached to the robins and blue-jays in their nests overhead. This was at evening, he said; for in the morning they sang so loudly, and were otherwise so inattentive, that the most eloquent discourses fell on unappreciating ears.

On the fourth day after our return, Julia sent for Winnie, and as she predicted, I was very lonely without her. The long, warm days—and they were very long, and very warm—passed slowly. Flowers drooped beneath the scorching sun, whose rays fell broadly on the river, tossed up here and there by the ripples in tiny pyramids of glittering light; birds sang only, when the dew was on the leaves.

My life was a mere state of passivity expressed by the verb "to be."

XII.

"The noon-day heat hath hushed the air,
And leaflets drink with noiseless glee
Their fill of light, and every where
The hot earth pulses silently.

"Adown through ash-leaved maple limbs,
That guard with green the open sash,
A thousand rays with voiceless hymns,
A golden throng, benignant flash."

THE purplish shades of twilight were deepening and darkening as I rode along the broad level street of the village where Mary Shelton lived. White cottages, with trellis-work, and lattices, and lights gleaming in and out among the vines lay on either side, and beyond, a block of city-like brick stores sent out a volume of light that fell on trees and fences across the road.

Passing these, the evening seemed darker, and the houses came less frequently, till we at length stopped before one with a wide piazza along the front, and a deep yard sloping to the street. The parlor blinds were thrown wide open; and through the thin, white curtains, I could discern many moving figures.

Mary met me in the hall; and then we went to

her own room, where she told me of her brother who had that morning arrived from the South.

"Brother Charley and his wife have come in to see him," she said, "and to-night's stage will bring De Witt from New York. The children are perfectly beside themselves with joy; and I have told them so much about you, that their happiness will be complete when they know you are here."

As she was speaking, the door creaked softly, and a pair of roguish eyes appeared at the crack.

"Now don't think, Edith," she began, anticipating me, "that you come as a stranger among us. We all know you, and shall enjoy your visit more at this time, than at any other you could have chosen. Come in, Georgie; this is Edie, that I told you about; and if your face is very clean, you may give her one little kiss."

But Georgie, not seeing fit to accept the invitation, swung the door wide open, and with a half-bashful, merry laugh, scampered down stairs.

"Georgie's face is very clean," we heard him whispering to himself as he again came up, breathing very hard, and trying to step lightly. "Georgie's face is very clean, and Katy will wash Artie's, and then both of us will kiss the lady;" but he could not be prevailed upon to cross the threshold till Artie came.

As we went down to the parlors, Mary led me to her mother, who with an air of languid pleasure sat looking about upon her children, scattered in various parts of the room; Charley talking with

Ernest, the newly-arrived—his wife telling Georgie, now sitting quietly on her knee, a story that made his bright eyes sparkle—and Henry, a boy of fifteen, showing Artie, fresh from Katy's hands, a book of pictures that elicited sundry original comments, and sudden, gleeful bursts of laughter.

Georgie, who had interrupted auntie's story a dozen times to "listen," was first to catch the sound of approaching wheels; and sliding from her lap, he rushed tumultuously into the hall.

"Ah, Charley!" said a pleasant voice at the door, and "brother De Witt" appeared, with Georgie on his shoulder.

"Ernest, my good fellow, how are you? Sunburned a little, I see, but it 's the same face I 've hunted after, all over every steamer that 's come in for the last month.

"You here, too, Annie? and they 've made a great feast, and 'killed the fatted calf,' I suppose," he added, in a lower tone.

"Don't, De Witt!" whispered Mary, laying her hand on his arm; and he turned quickly at its touch.

"Oh! beg your pardon, Mamie—I did n't mean to say any thing wrong;—you just remind me, though, when I do, and I shall get along well enough. Henry—Artie—have n't you a word for me? I have n't forgotten you, mother—always reserve the best to the last, you know."

"This is Miss Brewster, my son, a school-mate of Mary's."

"Excuse me, Miss Brewster, I had n't noticed that there was a stranger present; but if mother had waited a minute longer, I should have called you 'sister'! I say, Ernest, why did n't you bring home a wife? There 's such a host of us boys, with only one sister (begging your pardon, Annie), that each one, as soon as he is old enough, ought to do as—ahem!—as I intend to."

Artie, who was a little shy of his stranger-brother, Ernest, and had clung closely to Henry and the pictures, now looked up in surprise at the laugh succeeding this speech, not quite comprehending its import; but Georgie, taking it for granted that something very funny had been said, or done, shouted "Ho! ho! ho!" till his father, by a word of reproof, silenced him.

"Two of my boys are very boisterous, Miss Brewster," said Mrs. Shelton, turning with an apologetical smile to me; and I, as I could not gainsay her statement, merely smiled in return. Their boisterousness, as she was pleased to term it—and it was not altogether a misapplied word—produced about the same effect on her that her reproofs did on them; and it required very little observation to see that one look from the father was more effectual than the mother's manifold admonitions.

Mrs. Shelton must have possessed an uncommon degree of beauty in her youth, to be so strikingly handsome at fifty. In figure, tall and queenly, with much natural grace, and assumed dignity,

she appeared, to casual observers, a superior woman: but to those who saw her at home, and often, as I afterward did, her lack of energy, and indecision of character, combined with vanity and self-conceit, neutralized the effect of fine personal appearance.

Mary was, like her father, gentle, intellectual, and habitually calm;—of exquisite sensibilities, with a heart full of love for all created things, that manifested itself in deeds, but rarely in words.

Ernest, in person resembled his mother, with eyes that

> "Take in light as the stars give it out,
> Till they grow introspective."

Mr. Shelton, passing about the room, with now and then a word for Georgie, a story for Artie, and longer conversations with the older ones, came near where Mary and I were sitting. For a full hour he talked with us; and such was the charm of his conversation, that I had not missed "sister Annie" from the room, till she came back bonnetted and shawled to say good-night.

It was already eleven o'clock: Georgie and Artie had some time before been enticed away by Katy; and as the room grew still, Mary brought the great family Bible, and read, her father listening, with one hand shading his eyes—her mother arranging the folds of her dress, and placing her pretty hand in a noticeable position on the arm of her chair. She knelt with the rest, after a careful

disposal of the rustling silken folds; and had not mother Eve's spirit been strong in me then, I should never have known that she was premeditating a new arrangement of the shelf ornaments, which was carried into effect the next morning.

All the next day, the sun baked the parched earth, and shriveled up the green leaves, while shrill-toned insects increased their volume of sound, in proportion as the heat became more and more oppressive.

With Mary beside me, I read and talked alternately, at the shaded window, glancing out between the leaves at the passers-by. But the footfalls grew less and less frequent, and at noon, ceased altogether; and the only sounds without were those of some slowly-driven vehicle preceding a cloud of ashy dust, and the continuous whirring of uncomfortable insects.

After dinner, Ernest, De Witt, and Henry betook themselves to the further extremity of the garden, where, shaded by half a score of trees, whose interlaced branches excluded the sun from the turf beneath, they smoked cigars, and read newspapers; while I, luxuriating in dreamy poems, lay on the sofa; and Mary played me fairy dances, and spirit waltzes, that gradually came to be clouds of harmony, wrapping me in their fleecy softness, and rolling away with me into real dreamland. When I awoke, I was alone. Mary had gone to give directions about preparation for the morrow's pic-nic; for as De Witt was to return to

New York in two days, all his, Ernest's, and Mary's friends in the neighborhood were to spend the afternoon in a great grove five miles distant.

As I picked up the book which had fallen from my hand, and rose to leave the room, Georgie came rushing in, and as he could find no one else to play with, begged for "one little game" of "hide and seek," which was protracted till the tea-bell rang.

Afterward, as we sat on the back piazza, enjoying the coolness that succeeded the intense heat of mid-day, De Witt drove rapidly from the direction of the carriage-house, calling out,

"Get your bonnets quick, Mary—Miss Brewster—Gray won't wait a minute!"

"Rather an unceremonious invitation, my son," said Mr. Shelton; and Artie said—

"I guess it 's De Witt that can't wait; don't you, papa?"

"Now, which way will you go?" he asked, before we were fairly seated in the carriage; "toward the grove, or over to East Hill, or down to the 'Ivies'?"

"I would n't go toward the grove," said Mary, "because, you know, we shall go there to-morrow."

So Gray's master turned her head to the south, and we soon came to a broad plain, where three roads intersected; one lying straight before us, one stretching toward the south-east, and one toward the setting sun, which shot up golden rays from behind the dusky hills.

"Now, Miss Brewster, choose a road for us," said De Witt, suddenly reining in the pony, that shook its long mane, and champed its bit, impatient of restraint.

"Let Gray decide," I said; and in obedience to a low whistle from her master, she sprang forward, and took the western road.

"Pretty good taste that, my pony—I should commend you highly if it was entirely your own choice; but, you see, I observed these girls looking slyly in that direction, and it was impossible for me to get up a counter-charm. This animal magnetism is a queer sort of thing, Gray; I don't believe in it altogether;" and so De Witt addressed himself to the spirited animal, that, knowing its young master's voice, went on fleetly, till we left the open plain, and the road grew narrow, hedged in on either side with ivy bushes.

"Oh! what a pity that the blossoms are all gone!" said Mary. "Last summer we used to come here, and carry home the carriage full of them."

"Now, Mary, that is very wrong," said her brother, looking her full in the face. "How many times have you told me that all these things are ordered for the best; so, that for the life of me I don't dare use the mildest forms of conventional nouns and adjectives, when a tremendous thunderstorm comes up and spoils all my fun; and here you are blaming something, or somebody, just because these insignificant ivy blossoms are—Whoa,

Grey! Look girls! By Jove if that is n't glorious!"

As he spoke, he threw back the carriage top, and we rose simultaneously, looking toward East Hill, which lay far behind us. Its base was dun, and misty, and purplish gray shadows were creeping to the summit, where the sun's last rays rested. Billowy clouds above it grew ruddy, towering up to a mountain like the one they crested—toppling over like heaped up masses of foam—burning out as the sun sank, like fiery embers dropping to ashes. Far to the north-west, dark clouds were rising rapidly, and as they came toward us, gathering blackness, the wind rose, as if to prepare a path for the on-coming storm—bowing the tree-tops in the distance—sending dust-messengers along the road—setting the ivy-leaves a fluttering.

De Witt turned Grey's head quickly homeward; and after the simoon swept over us, carrying before it sand, and leaves, and broken tree-twigs, we turned to

"Watch the lightnings dart like swallows, round the brooding thunder-eaves."

As we reached home after the violence of the storm was over—for Gray was not able long to keep in advance of the clouds—Mrs. Shelton met us in the hall, with upraised hands, and a countenance indicative of the deepest concern.

"Oh! my dear children!" she exclaimed so em-

phatically, that I thought an accident must have befallen some member of the family, the nature of which, she was about to disclose.

"I say, mother," said De Witt, regardless of her tragic attitude, "we 've had the grandest kind of a ride, by—accident! I did n't say any thing, Mary —thunder-clouds as black as—jet! and streaks of lightning as long as your arm, that came just in time to show little Gray the road; and by Jove! did n't she improve them! Would n't you like just such another ride, Mollie?"

Mary shook her head.

"You would, Miss Brewster." He spoke not queryingly, but with confidence; and I answered just as I felt.

"Yes, indeed."

Mrs. Shelton looked at me with an expression of surprise; and I saw that I was losing caste in her eyes: it was so unlady-like to enjoy any but the gentlest, sweetest, mildest things—things that she made a semblance of appreciating: but I doubted at that moment—and the doubt never afterward left my mind—whether any worshipful object ever received more than lip-service from her.

Mary loved all gentle, pure, and holy things; and had she made an attempt to find exquisite pleasure in greatness and power—in darkness and tempest, it would have been a sin against her nature; consequently her mother approved that which was conventional, fancying that she had given the right bent to her daughter's mind, never

once dreaming that nature could have done so much unaided. She could not know what it was to feel amid the crashing of thunder, and the fury of tempest, a strength from within battling with, and overcoming theirs: to hear a voice from the innermost soul saying,

"Ye are but faint expressions of that Power that formed us immortal! Inasmuch as ye are strong, inspire us with all dominant strength: ye can make us quail before your blackness—never!"

XIII.

EARLY in the afternoon, three carriages stopped before the gate, preceding two more slowly driven; and during the next half hour, they assembled from all directions.

The parlors were filled with bright faces, clustering by threes and fours around Ernest, then moving away to make room for others.

Sometimes De Witt, and sometimes Mary, introduced me to merry groups, and sedate couples, till one roguish looking brunette, with great laughing eyes, exclaimed

"Do label us, Mary! how do you suppose one can remember all our names?"

"The chief difficulty would be in the application," replied De Witt, who seemed to hear every remark, and to be in all places at the same time.

Immediately after the last arrival, we started; Ernest, Mary, Henry and I, taking the lead in the family carriage. The rain of the previous night had washed the dust from the leaves, and sprinkled the streets so thoroughly, that all the power of all the sun's rays were inefficient to restore the former order of things.

De Witt, mounted on his favorite little Gray,

occasionally galloped beside us for a short distance: but as a carriage in the rear seemed to demand his particular care, Mary banished him by word of command, from our presence, telling him that no one cared for divided attentions; and Ernest added,

"Somebody will be undoing all you've said to Kate:—go back, and don't haunt us any more."

Henry drove on in silence, and I tried to think of something to say to him; but the longer I tried, the less I could think of that would be at all applicable to the time, place, or occasion: and there sat critical Ernest, who would think sarcastic thoughts that he was too polite to speak; so I kept silence partly through fear of him.

A little blue-eyed girl, playing on the bank beside the road, stopped to gaze at our procession of carriages, calling to two others who were placing bits of broken crockery on a shingle table—

"Look, Susie! O, Caddy! look and see the funeral!"

"Oh, it is n't any such thing!" said Susie, who had jumped up quickly, and, with hands folded behind her, stood looking bashfully at us, only half showing a pair of keen, black eyes beneath her white sun-bonnet. "Funerals don't go near so fast!"

"I guess they do, when they think there is n't any body looking at them!" persisted the first speaker.

"No, they don't!" said Susie, decidedly, "because I've seen them! and they don't have a man

to ride horseback, neither; and besides, some of the people in the carriages always wear black dresses and black bonnets, and cry!"

"Original reasoning, certainly," said Ernest.

"I should like to hear the rest of it," said Mary, looking back at the trio, who appeared to be talking very earnestly; but the rattling of the wheels, as Henry drove faster, drowned the sound of their voices.

"There! De Witt has stopped!" exclaimed our driver, suddenly, for the moment forgetting himself. "Look! he is telling them some wonderful story!"

"Of course!" said Ernest; and as Henry drew up his reins in imitation of the example of those behind, some of whom appeared highly amused, we looked back at De Witt, who, with his handkerchief in his hand, was talking with the three.

They had retreated a little from the edge of the bank, and stood looking up into his face with eyes full of wonder; and as he turned away, I noticed that they did not return to their table, but remained in the same place, looking anxiously after us.

"What can it be?" said Mary, looking toward Ernest, who answered,

"Oh! we shall know in a day or two:—what did De Witt ever keep to himself longer than that?"

Near the entrance of the grove the various parties alighted; and thus, all being again brought

together, the confusion exceeded that of the first meeting. Presently the excitement began in a measure to subside, several of the noisiest having gone in search of a pleasant place. These were followed by the more sedate, carrying numerous baskets and packages to a cool spot of level ground, hemmed in by green banks that could scarcely be called hills.

This was the valley, where, for a score of years, pleasure parties had dined, summer after summer.

From the foot of the highest bank a pure spring bubbled; and, overflowing its basin, glistened through the grass across the valley—then forcing its way through a cleft rock, grew dark and still, till lost among the trees beyond.

While the sedate ones laid the cloth within sound and reach of the bubbling water, bringing treasures of fruit from the depths of huge baskets, unrolling napkins full of biscuit, and uncovering pyramids of cake, the rest strayed away in groups and pairs.

De Witt was the first whose absence was noticed, and immediately it was rumored that Kate was nowhere to be found: so several wise ones, with one consent, asserted that they had gone together.

Mary knew of a beautiful spot at some distance, where a mammoth grape-vine festooned a peerless oak; so off we started, passing, on the way, the truant De Witt, whose example we were following.

"Hallo! Ernest—where now?" he exclaimed, as his brother brushed suddenly past, after stealthily advancing as near the absorbed twain as possible.

"Where it would take you a week to find us, at that pace!" was the reply; while De Witt, in no wise disconcerted, turned to us, who were walking slowly.

Knowing him to be an ardent admirer of beauty, I had pictured to myself an elegant "Kate," with shining hair, and deep, dark eyes, and an air of indefinable grace. With all physical perfection had I endowed her whose name was so often on Mary's lips; and, fast as one image faded, another appeared in its stead, still wearing that same shining hair, and the deep eyes that changed from darkest blue through soft hazel to dreamy black.

What, then, was my surprise, when, on overtaking the lady, who had walked on slowly while he waited for us, I found her—not slight, for the word often suggests grace;—but tall, thin, and exceedingly plain—repulsively so, she seemed at first.

"Is it possible that your brother fancies her?" I asked, impulsively, as, after the introduction, we turned to follow Ernest.

Mary laughed. "You would ask another question, if you knew her as well as I do."

"What?"

"'Is it possible that she fancies him?'"

"And are they really engaged?" I asked, with girlish curiosity;—for it seemed to me a strange thing that a person I had seen and conversed with, and who seemed not very much older than I, should have taken such a terrible leap.

"If my affirmation would surely make it so, I would say 'yes' twice," said Mary, earnestly; but there was a shade of sadness in the smile accompanying her words.

"No, Edith;—there are reasons that I can not give, why they are not, and probably will never be engaged."

"But I can, and will give them!" interrupted a voice close behind us. "Go on, if you please, Mary, and find Ernest, while I speak with Miss Brewster."

Mary looked anxiously at De Witt as he spoke, his face glowing with excitement; and he, guessing the restraint she would lay upon him, added quickly,

"I promise you, Mamie, I'll not say any thing wrong:—Miss Brewster shall tell you if I do;—go on."

And Mary went on, but was scarcely out of hearing when he began.

"You have heard Ernest and Mary speak of Kate Hyde often?"

"Never—till about an hour since."

"Well, you have seen her. I will not ask you now what you think of her;—you can not (though others have done it) form an opinion of her before

acquaintance. I will tell you what I know of her. In the first place, she is an orphan; in the second place, poor; in the third place, plain. Her parents, too, were poor, and her grand-parents before them; without even the virtue of pride to put them on an equal footing with the baser rich. These are all her misfortunes—each one of which is, to me, an argument in her favor. Now for the other side. She has a noble heart—a royal intellect—an indomitable spirit of energy. From childhood thrown upon her own resources, she has managed so to educate herself, that not a girl within—well, I 'll not say a thousand miles of this village, because I don't happen to know them all; but I do know that not one in this village can begin to compete with her. My father knows and appreciates her, and approves my choice. With her beside me to suggest—encourage—stimulate—I could do any thing: now, an unknown lawyer in a great city, without a single friend at hand—what can I do? If I could but reverse our positions—or, what would be better still, place her far above me—how easy it would be to become worthy of her! But my mother—Miss Brewster, is it wrong to tell you? —my mother has commanded me to think her beneath me! as if it were possible for me to think so, even if it were true! and you yourself know it is not—if you believe what I have said. And Kate seems to have guessed it instinctively—for she will not listen to me. Do not

think that I despair—for I believe she loves me; but I must uncomplainingly bide my time, I suppose. Oh my mother!"

The last sentence was spoken in a tone very different from the rest: indeed, in his manner throughout the whole, there was a strange mixture of the pathetic and ludicrous. But the next moment the clinched fingers relaxed, while the firmly shut teeth remained closed for an instant longer, as if to keep back the words that seemed about to utter hard truths.

"Beg your pardon for keeping you here so long, Miss Brewster—the 'spirit moved' just then, and I had to speak, or choke! I 've done with you now! There! I 'd nearly forgotten what sent me in this direction! After you left us, I saw your handkerchief lying on the grass—don't keep me any longer—I must n't listen to any more stories! Miss Hyde will think me exceedingly ungallant! Tell Ernest not to launch into three-chapter dreams till after dinner, or I shall appropriate his peaches: and if he asks what kept you so long, tell him a distaste for his company: as for Mary, she knows well enough what you staid for, and will ask no questions."

I went on rapidly after he left me, but had not proceeded very far when I overtook Mary.

"I thought I would wait and show you the way," she said; and then, perhaps fearing that I should suspect her of keeping back part of the truth, added,

"Ernest might think it strange that I should run off and leave you with De Witt."

We walked on hand in hand, sometimes talking, and much of the time in silence, till we reached the vine-draped oak, at the foot of which Ernest lay, looking upward at the branches, and the birds his coming had disturbed.

"So Miss Hyde has detained you all this time!" he said, springing up, and rolling two large stones against the tree for seats. "Charmed with her beauty, eh?"

"Her beauty may be that of intellect, manifesting itself only to the favored few," I answered, quickly, not quite liking the tone in which he spoke.

"Then you have become a convert to that doctrine!—taken lessons of De Witt, perhaps."

I had been rather off my guard at first, my feelings having been enlisted in Miss Hyde's favor; but his supposition recalled to mind De Witt's parting admonition, and I replied,

"Plain people are supposed to possess beauty of intellect, by way of compensation for physical defects. I have had no opportunity of knowing whether or not this is true of Miss Hyde; but common-place remarks of a general kind are sometimes applicable to particular persons."

"So, judging from appearances, you would call Miss Kate uncommonly gifted?"

"I have seen people who could, on that score, lay claim to greater gifts than she!"

"Indeed! you must have traveled considerably!"

"On the contrary, I have never made but one journey of any length."

"Perhaps you may be blessed with uncommon powers of observation; but it strikes me just now, that there is no particular advantage in being unmitigatedly ugly; individuals as a general thing, look better to be good-looking."

"Consequently, all good-looking ones ought to be crowned!" added Mary, who had been wistfully regarding the clusters of leaves above her head; "So please procure us leaves enough for three chaplets—grape-leaves for yourself, if you choose to be crowned Bacchant, and oak for us."

"Oh dear! what a bore it is to be polite to ladies!" sighed Ernest, still half reclining on the grass. "Don't you think one of you could reach them?"

"Not possibly!" said Mary; while I at the same instant exclaimed, "Oh, yes," and forthwith began searching for a long stick with which to draw down the branches.

Meanwhile, Ernest ascended the tree, and whole handsful of leaves fluttered down on our heads, scattered by a pair of hands that dispensed foliage-favors with most uncalled-for liberality.

"O! do come down now!" cried Mary; "you have made a 'locust progress' over two of the largest branches, already; if you stay much longer, we shall be obliged to make our wreaths in the

sun! see how you have let its rays through on us!"

Being thus entreated, Ernest descended; and assuming his favorite position on the grass, watched us as we twined the stems of the broad grape-leaves together, then bowed his handsome head at Mary's playful word of command, to be crowned.

"Now sing for us that Anacreontic ode," she said, binding the wreath above his brows, and twisting into more decided curliness the long dark hair beneath it.

As in compliance with her request, he sang

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine,"

I thought how surpassingly beautiful the eyes must be, to be pledged with such as his: even those of my imaginary "Kate" could not be divine enough. At first, they might have been; but so soon is the ideal merged in the real, that the deep eyes after growing suddenly pale, could never quite regain their primal luster.

For a long time we sat twisting together stems of oak leaves with snatches of song between, our Bacchant lying at our feet, with one arm on a low, flat rock, his crowned head resting on his hand. Thus he watched the clouds that rose as the sun sank lower, calling us to look at the purple palaces, regal in form and hue, that shot up higher and higher, then melted into a billowy ocean, with white sails on its breast.

"Hallo!" shouted De Witt, coming suddenly upon us. "What in the name of all that 's exciting, have you been doing for the last hour or two? Wake up, and come to dinner! Quick, too! for one of my sort of thunder-storms is brewing over there in the east, though I guess it 'll take it some time to get here. Come, Miss Brewster—Mary—leave him alone, and he 'll come to his senses by sunset."

"What is the matter?" asked Ernest, deliberately turning toward his brother without raising his head.

"We are enjoying ourselves in an extemporaneous way, having a 'feast of reason,' et cetera."

"Well, finish it, if you choose," interrupted De Witt, "we prefer a feast of peaches, et cetera. Come, Mary."

"Wait a minute, brother mine, and while I am rising, tell us what you have been about?"

"I? I could n't begin to tell you! I 've walked the circumference of the grove, and the diameter, till I know every inch of ground in and around it —have broken off more oak and maple branches —pulled up more trees by the roots—dug up more rocks, and done more things generally, than you all could have accomplished in a week. But come, I can tell you the rest just as well on the way: they 're all hungry and thirsty down there, and if we 're not forthcoming soon, the tables will be cleared, and the spring drained dry!"

"Go on, Gulliver," said Ernest, jumping up, "I 'll follow."

"Not in that style! Head of Medusa! how heathenish you look! Put on a civilized hat—if you can find it this week!"

Along the path we raced, in emulation of De Witt's zeal, and arrived at the table warm, and breathless, just in time to take seats with the rest.

Wit and lemonade flowed freely, and conversation grew loud and louder, when a sudden clap of thunder struck each, for the moment, dumb. Then all rose simultaneously, while De Witt in high glee, shouted,

"To the barn!" indicating the direction with his hand; "I'll come in a minute with the edibles."

None waited for the consummation of his promise; but fleet feet led the way, and slower ones followed; till just at the edge of the woods we found a weather-beaten barn, with doors swinging wide open in the wind that came rushing among us, scattering bonnets, and making banners of scarfs and vails.

Lightnings darted hither and thither; thunders muttered in the distance, and suddenly crashed overhead, and the rain fell in torrents. Above all the roar and confusion, De Witt's voice rose; and looking down the path, I saw him dashing along with a basket in either hand, while behind him came the rest similarly equipped, and drenched with the pelting rain.

"Here come the spoils!" shouted one.

"In a double sense!" added De Witt, whose lungs sent forth sound as the clouds did rain.

In a short time the violence of the storm was over; and, as it was a long walk to the carriages, Ernest proposed bringing them around by an old cart-path, to the barn-door—before which they soon came up one by one.

The sun shone out fierily as we started, touching the tree-tops, and fringing the dun clouds with crimson and gold, that grew deeper, and more golden as the last rays disappeared. It was quite dark when we reached home.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried Artie, rushing into the house one day after school, with unusual haste, and a marvelous amount of noise for a quiet, bashful child, "Georgie 's dead, and all buried!"

"Why, no, Artie!" said Mary; "come here and tell me what makes you think so."

"Why, little Susie Newton told me, and a man told her, and there was ever so many carriages!" said the little fellow, looking anxiously up into his sister's face, and breathing quickly. "*Is* Georgie dead?"

"No, no, dear," answered Mary soothingly, "the man should n't have told Susie so; run up into the nursery now, and see if he is n't playing with his blocks, as much alive as you are."

Away Artie went, but soon came trotting into his mother's room again, leading Georgie by the hand.

"See, mamma!" he called out, "here he is, just as 'live as I am!" while Georgie, not clearly under-

standing the matter, said, over and over again, as if interrogating himself,

"Will Georgie be dead? Will Georgie be dead?"

"Now I know what De Witt was talking to those little girls about," said Mary, as her mother went back to the nursery with the children. "Did any one ever have such a brother as that one of mine? But how I do miss him! Without you, Edie, I should be very lonely now."

And the children missed him, too. De Witt was the life of all their plays. It was he who planned new amusements for them when the old ones ceased to please—who had an endless fund of exciting stories for every occasion—who settled all little difficulties between them when Mary was away—who could be more noisy than Georgie, even, and who could lift them both—one on each hand—almost to the wall.

Ernest played with them sometimes, it is true; but when he was tired, or when he wished to read, or talk, they were voted a bore and sent speedily to the nursery: and mamma's nerves were weak, so they must be very still in her room unless there were visitors present; and Mary, who so dearly loved to amuse them, must read to her mother, who could not bear to have her darling out of sight for a single hour.

"She is a weak, vain, fussy woman!" I used to say to myself, after listening for some time to her frivolous, common-place remarks; "and if Angus Holmes or any one else wishes to know what

Julia Arnold will be at fifty, I can refer him to Mrs. Shelton."

Fleeing precipitately from her presence, I one day encountered Ernest on the stairs, and at his request, went with him to the balcony, where he had been reading.

It was on the coolest side of the house, and, shaded by grape-vines, overhung a pleasant portion of the garden.

Here, where the sun could scarcely find its way between the broad leaves, he was accustomed to sit through the warmest hours of the day, beholding poet-visions, and dreaming poet-dreams.

"My indolent son," his mother complaisantly styled him; while De Witt, whose activity knew no bounds, called him "lazy fellow," "girlish dreamer," and "ridiculous boy."

Sometimes, indeed, Ernest aroused himself, and retorted; but Mary interceded, and soothed, and gave to bitter words a playful meaning; doing all in so sweet a spirit, that the antagonists sheathed their swords, and adjourned their battle, speedily forgetting all past grievances.

Now De Witt was gone, nothing disturbed the elder brother's repose. Mary would never knock at his door if there was a possibility of its annoying him, and Mrs. Shelton never questioned his right to do as he pleased in every thing; so when he removed his reading-table to the balcony, even roguish Georgie only dared peep at him from

the head of the stairs, never interrupting him unless by special invitation.

Concluding, therefore, that my presence was desired, because requested, I took the offered chair, glancing at the books that, intermixed with papers, and pens, and scattered pencils, covered the surface of the table.

"There are some things there I should like to show you," he remarked, laying his hand on two volumes near me. "You have studied Greek?"

"Not at all."

"Nor Latin?"

"A very little."

"Then I can not read you these in the original, but I have some very fine translations. Will you listen to a few of my favorite passages?"

"With pleasure."

"You are fond of dramatic works," he said, looking up from the volume, as he ceased reading, with a half smile.

It was scarcely an interrogatory; but he had not, till now, once looked to see whether I was pleased or not; so I considered it in the light of a question, and answered, evasively,

"I like to read Shakespeare."

He closed the book so suddenly, that I was sure he must have misinterpreted my reply.

"I wonder if he thinks I like nothing but Shakespeare!" I said to myself. "How could I answer him in that way?" So, racking my brains for something with which to neutralize the effect

of my words, I at length succeeded—partially, at least—and mentioned a sentence I had once seen quoted, that impressed itself on my memory.

"Oh! that is from Menander, I think!" and he turned over the leaves with unwonted alacrity.

"Here, I have it!—let me read it to you in Greek—it is perfectly musical;" and as I expressed a desire to hear more, he read on, till Mary, coming up the stairs, called me; and excusing myself, I went with her to our room.

So every day afterward, while Mary read to her mother below stairs, he read to me on the balcony, till I began to look forward to the hour when he would summon me to the chair opposite his at the reading-table.

It was ten days since I left home. Coming from the balcony, as usual, to join Mary at noon, a servant met me with a letter.

"It is from Winnie!" I exclaimed; "the one I have been expecting so long!"

I glanced at the direction—it was in a strange hand! Tearing open the envelope with trembling fingers—for a dim fear that I dared not acknowledge flashed across me—"Died this morning," were the first words, the only words I saw; and refolding the paper, I placed it in its envelope.

"Is Winnie at home?" asked Mary, turning the blinds as we entered the room.

"I have not read it yet," I answered, calmly, trying to will down the throbbings of my heart.

Perhaps the great fear manifested itself in my

face. Mary soon left the room, and I reopened my letter.

It was from Mr. Armstrong, announcing dear father Holmes' death! How fast the tears fell—blotting the paper as I read! I had not thought that he could die so soon—so suddenly! Oh, why was I not at home!

But there was no time to waste in vain regrets. Finding Mary, I placed the letter in her hand, and in half an hour's time was ready for my journey.

Mrs. Shelton loudly regretted the necessity for my immediate return.

"Now he is dead," she said, "it will not make much difference if you do not go home. If he was dying, and had sent for you, there would be more need of haste; but you say he was not a relative, and probably half of the friends will not know whether you are there or not. But if you *will* go now, write to us soon, and next vacation come and make us a longer visit. Poor Mr. Holmes! I hope he died happy! A minister, did you say, Mary? Oh, of course he did, then! Well, good-by, my dear," and she kissed me with a show of affection.

"Miss Brewster," said Ernest, from the balcony, as I was returning to my room for a missing glove, "will you go without a word for me?"

He stood by his table, with one hand extended.

"Good-by," I said, mechanically, advancing a step or two. The hand I gave was retained a moment, and when I withdrew it a tiny note was slipped beneath my glove.

How lifeless the dark house seemed, at the end of the avenue! How still my own room was! with its curtains looped just as I left them—its blinds barring the light that fell through them on the floor.

The note was still beneath my glove, and for a long time I dared not break its seal. It was very brief, though I read it for a full hour:—

"Edith, I love you with my whole heart. You will not forget me?"

"Is it not late to go out?" my grandmother asked, as I passed her door with my sun-bonnet on my arm.

"It is not dusk, grandma."

"Well, go, my child, but do not stay long."

Wondering at the softened tone in which she spoke, I passed down the stairs, and soon reached the foot-bridge: but here I paused. How could I enter that sacred house! Since I last crossed its threshold, an angel had entered, and thence a spirit had passed, putting off mortality. Bowing my head upon my hands, I listened to the soothing murmur of the water, and tried to think how that holy face would look in heaven, amid the hosts of the redeemed. There were footsteps on the bridge, and looking up, I saw Angus, who said,

"Edith, I am so glad you have come!"

Then we went together, meeting Emily in the garden, who led me to the study, and looped up

the curtains, letting in the gray light, that fell like a vail over the still features of the dead. There was the same broad, pale forehead, the same white hair, brushed smoothly backward: and the freed spirit—had not that form, and features, and a glory shining around its head, like that of the Beloved Disciple?

Winnie stole softly to my side, and laid her head upon my shoulder—her sobs alone breaking the stillness of the room, where no one dared speak.

"Were you here when he died?" I asked of her, as we went out and sat upon the piazza, apart from the rest.

Winnie shook her head. "They sent for me, but I was unworthy of his last blessing—he died just as I entered the house. Oh, Edie! pity me! miserable—miserable—"

I tried to soothe her, but she would not listen.

"Do not talk to me to-night, Edith—some other time I have a great deal to say to you; but do not, oh do not try to comfort me now!"

As I was passing through the garden on my way home, Emily called me back.

"I have a message for you," she said, and I went and sat on the step at her feet, to hear it.

"When he was dying," she began, in a tremulous voice, "he prayed for all of us, especially for Angus and Winnie, and then his mind seemed to wander. But in a moment, he looked at each one who was standing beside him, and asked—'Where is Winnie? I thought she had come.' I

told him it was nearly time for her to be here, and then he spoke of you. 'I shall not see her here,' he said, 'but tell her there I must meet her, and you all. Her mother was like a daughter to me, and so is she.' He repeated this so many times that we thought his mind was again wandering. Suddenly he started up, 'She is coming! I hear —Winnie—Edith—my children—my Jesus make them thine!' His quickened senses had caught the sound of approaching wheels, and he seemed struggling to live till she should come; but just as she crossed the threshold, his head sank backward on my arm, and a shadow like that of a cloud passed downward over his face. My sainted father!"

Emily did not weep as she told me this, nor did she utter one word of grief or sorrow at the great bereavement. But in the sunken eyes and pallid face, I read a language, all unspoken, because too deep for words.

XIV.

"Take them, O great Eternity!
Our little life is but a gust,
That bends the branches of thy tree,
And trails its blossoms in the dust."

LONGFELLOW.

"The very source and fount of day
Is dashed with wandering isles of night."

IN MEMORIAM.

THE funeral was over, and the few friends who came from a distance to witness the last rites, had returned. Very lonely the house seemed, for Death left silence in the shadow that brooded there.

Angus and Winnie came to see me twice and often thrice a day, and even Emily sometimes stole away toward evening, and sat for a half hour with me. Mrs. Keene called often, and took Emily to ride with her; and Mr. Armstrong gave up his evening study-hours, and read and talked with the sorrowing group. Just at dusk Angus would almost daily come for me, and Winnie would persuade me at the close of the evening to remain till morning, the house was so silent, she said, and she could not sleep when they were alone.

"Did you enjoy your visit with Julia?" I inquired one night, trying to turn her mind from the subject that occupied every thought, and made each breath a sigh.

A faint "Yes," was my only answer.

"Tell me all about it," I persisted. "I shall not be sleepy before midnight."

With a half sob, she laid her head on my pillow, and passed her hand softly over my cheek.

"Do you remember, Edie, that dreadful night, when he lay dead, and you tried to comfort me, and I could not bear it?"

"Yes."

"And then I said that some time I had a great deal to tell you?"

"Yes."

"For a long time I hoped you had forgotten it; but my conscience will not let me rest, day nor night, till I have told some one."

"Well, then, I will be your sister-confessor, and if you come very penitently, perhaps I may grant you absolution."

"Don't, Edie, don't! You will not speak so when you hear it—you would not believe that I could be so wicked!"

Half guessing the nature of her confession, I said nothing, and she went on.

"The day after my arrival at Julia's, she said, Mr. Lee was in town, and would spend the evening with us. I thought when I last saw him at school that he was going South, and I had been trying very hard to overcome the—my feelings toward him. I even thought I had conquered them; but when she told me this I was very, very glad, and then almost immediately I was sorry, remembering the

promise I once made you. Then I determined to treat him very coldly; but oh, Edie! when he came I forgot it all. After that I saw him every day, and we walked, and rode, and talked together. I could not help it—and he seemed nobler and better than any one I had ever seen before. One day I had a long letter from father: he was in the room when it came, and I ran up stairs to read it. I don't know how it was, perhaps Angus told him —but he had heard of Mr. Lee, and feared he was not a suitable companion for me. Oh, Edie! it was such a dear kind letter, and he begged me so earnestly to remember all I had been taught when I was a little child at home—to think that I was too young to judge entirely for myself in matters that might affect my welfare eternally, and asked me, calling me 'his dear little daughter,' if I wished to break away from the home I could make so happy, and leave tried friends for strangers, and old influences for new, that might be better, yet might be worse—I did not know. But I only read it over hurriedly, glancing on to the last, where he spoke of his health as having been better for a day or two past. We were to take a ride that afternoon, and the carriage was already at the door, so I threw the letter hastily on the table, and ran down stairs, meeting Julia on the way, who inquired how I could read home-news so quickly. I told her I had only looked it over, but should have time enough to read it when I came back; and she went on, calling to us from the head of the stairs

to get our seats in the carriage, and she would be down in a moment. But when she came, it was only to say that she could not go with us this time. I thought it very strange, and wished to stay with her, but she would n't consent. I need n't tell you all that was said that evening, Edie, but before we came home I was engaged!"

Winnie's voice faltered, and she hesitated a moment before concluding.

"I forgot father—Emily—Angus—you—every body but him, and every thing but my great happiness. It was almost morning before I could get to sleep; and then I dreamed that you were dead—that every one that I had ever loved was dead—all but him! and I did not seem to care! I have dreamed such dreams since, Edie, and lain awake many nights, longer than I did then. The next morning, I remembered my half-read letter; but I searched the room for it in vain. I thought I knew where I left it, but it was gone—that precious letter!—and I never saw it afterward. In two days I received another;—it was from Mr. Armstrong, and father was dying! Edie, you can not guess my agony! I believe I was wild! I only remember they all stood by me, and I was lying on the bed—dying, it seemed to me—when the truth came back to me! And, Edie, I was so wicked—I had so sinned in the sight of Heaven—that the blessing was denied me!—that last blessing that I would give my worthless life to obtain!"

I had no words to speak. Soothing the little

hands that burned with a fever-heat, I drew her closer to me; and when, long after midnight, she fell asleep, exhausted with grief, I watched her pale face in the moonlight that filled the room, and wondered how I could ever have grieved her with harsh words, resolving to be more gentle henceforth.

Poor, dear Winnie!

Two days afterward, Mr. Lee made his appearance at the parsonage. She had written, asking him to release her from the engagement: it was her own desire to do so, to try to atone for the sin she had committed. This was what she said; and she seemed more at ease after the letter was sent; but when, contrary to her expectation, he came, all her fancied strength gave way, and she owned her weakness—a weakness that she could not conquer. He remained a week: sympathizing with her in gentle, loving words—talking with her of heaven, and the holy, happy life they might lead, till she was convinced that she, and we all, had misjudged him, and that even her father could not have condemned her choice. But since Mr. Lee's coming, there had been a new expression on the young pastor's face that I could not but notice; for I had never before dreamed that he too loved Winnie. She did not know it; and he withdrew more and more from her society, shutting himself up with books, and his own noble thoughts that his people heard, wondering at the power that dwelt beneath the calm exterior.

I returned to school alone. Winnie could not think of leaving Emily, especially since Angus was to be absent. Julia Arnold and Louise Hayward left at the close of the summer term; and Emily, Julia's sister, had been taken away, near the last of the vacation, sick of a brain fever. Mary Shelton was my room-mate; and when at dusk we laid aside our books after long days of study, and sat, hand in hand, talking of the past, we only regretted that Winnie could not be present to take a part in our twilight conversations. One evening—it was reception-evening—as we were leaving the tea-table, a letter was handed Mrs. Talcott, containing intelligence of Emily Arnold's death. It sent a thrill through every heart, though the poor, lame girl had few friends. Happy faces grew thoughtful, merry eyes were suddenly filled with tears, and jesting words died away on trembling lips. Who does not, at such a time, think of hastily-spoken words, or unjust deeds, or acts of neglect past all atoning for? What heart, however hard it may be, does not soften as it thinks of the pale, cold form shrouded for its rest —of the silent lips that can not utter words of forgiveness?

Angus was, as usual, the earliest caller of the evening.

"Have you heard from home?" was the first question, and it received a long answer. He had recently been at Maplewood, and had messages from Emily and Winnie, and twenty other things to tell.

"Have they heard from Julia Arnold?" I asked, as he finished.

"Not that I know of; I never inquire—but where 's Em?"

Something restrained me from telling him then, and I answered in the same tone,

"Always inquiring after her! Is that all you think of when you come here?"

"Certainly! you 're not jealous, are you?"

I could not answer—it seemed sacrilegious; still I dared not tell him the truth.

"Why did she usually spend her vacations here? Did she ever tell you?" I inquired, making an effort to change the subject.

"Yes: she has a dashing young step-mother, who at first took a violent dislike to Em. This was, of course, reciprocated. You have seen enough of her to know that she does n't love her enemies overmuch; so, as it was her wish, she was permitted to stay here through the vacations."

"I wonder if she was ever lonely here."

"She? No, indeed! there was a great library at her command, and that, with—ahem!—with my occasional presence, was better than a dozen homes, with or without step-mothers."

"Then you used to call here in the vacations! I did n't know it."

"Of course not! do you think I tell you every thing?"

"All that you can remember! Do you know

whether you have called within three or four weeks?"

"Yes—I am here now!"

"I am not jesting, Angus—please tell me."

"What impertinence!"

"Will you tell me?"

"No!"

"I am sorry!"

"For what? I have answered you!"

"When?"

"Just now: I said 'No.'"

"It was rather ambiguous. I thought you meant that you would n't inform me!"

"What has that to do with my seeing Em now? Where is she?"

I hesitated.

"Has n't she been back this term?"

"No."

"She was here in the middle of vacation—why did she leave?"

"Her father came for her, I believe."

"And has n't Mrs. Talcott heard from her since?"

"Yes."

My face flushed, and I trembled with excitement. I must tell him now, but in what way?

"What did she write?"

"The letter was from Julia."

"Did she say when her sister would return?"

I looked at him without answering, but he would not guess it.

"Tell me—is she coming back this winter?"

He inquired in an earnest tone, laying his hand on my arm.

"Oh, Angus! she will never come back!" I answered, with a sudden burst of tears.

He sprang to his feet, and I covered my face with my hands, vainly trying to become calm.

When I at length looked up, he was standing by the window, his face turned from me; so, slipping quietly from the room, I went out into the cool night air, passing through the garden to the arbor, where I could be alone. The parlors were filled when I returned; so I went in unnoticed, seating myself where I could closely observe Angus. Mrs. Talcott was standing beside him near the middle of the room, talking in a low tone. His answer, only, reached my ear.

"Miss Brewster told me a while ago. It must have been quite sudden!"

I was angry with him for betraying no more emotion.

"I must abbreviate my call this evening," he said, and turned toward the corner where I was sitting.

"Why need you be in haste?" Mrs. Talcott asked, detaining him.

"I have lessons to prepare for to-morrow: you will excuse me on that plea?"

There was a bright smile on his lips as he held out his hand to me.

"Good-night, Edith."

"Good-night."

All the rest of the evening I thought over the first scene. Could it be that Angus really loved Emily? poor Emily! He might marvel that so frail a body should trammel a mighty mind, and, marveling, he might admire—but, could he love? I doubted. I ceased to wonder that he betrayed no more emotion in Mrs. Talcott's presence. "For love," I reasoned, "must be based on fancy; and how can one fancy an object destitute of physical symmetry—without beauty of form or features—without even grace of manners?" And, doubting, I ceased to feel keenly for Angus, though I could not forget his manner when I told him she was dead, and why did he go away without coming to talk with me? I had more to say to him than "good-night!" Was he afraid I should allude to her? And when, after midnight, I awoke suddenly from a troubled dream, full of vague apprehensions, and felt as one only can feel in the hush and darkness of the first morning hours, the solemness of life, why did I long to bring her back from the dead? Why did I pray for one passed beyond the reach of prayer, that God would give her back again? It was not from any love for her, for we had never been friendly, always avoiding each other as much as possible—reciprocally repellant, like similar poles of the magnet, because possessed each of a will that would yield to gentle influences alone. But I felt that she was essential to the happiness of one who was dear to me as only brother;

and as my thinking imperceptibly glided into dreaming, I beheld him, calm, proud, erect in conscious nobleness, swaying millions of men by a word—a tone, expressive of his vast power; and near him stood a slight figure—one I had so often seen before: there were the same thin lips, it was the same stony face—only from the deep-set eyes gleamed triumphant brightness, and I knew that she had made him what he was.

XV.

"Cold winds, white snow,
Now rain, now blow,
And chill the landscape's Autumn glow;
The ice-bolts freeze
The naked trees,
And seal the old year's obsequies!

"The woods lie bare,
And here and there
The gray moss hangs its mournful hair;
The leaves that burned,
By fierce winds spurned,
Lie moldering in the soil inurned."

It was a clear November day, still, and intensely cold. It was Friday, besides, and there were no lessons to prepare for the morrow, so Mary and I sat by the window longer than usual, looking out on the garden, white with snow, which the day before we watched as it fell, with a sense of pleasure that the first snow of the season always brings.

At first the flakes came, tiny specks of white, and so powdered the trees, and lay lightly on the frozen earth; then they grew broader, and seemingly more irregular in shape, looking so dark when above the tree-tops, settling down pure and plentiful beneath the branches.

Now sleigh-bells jingled in the distance—ap-

proached, passed, and were soon out of hearing—all but one pair. A sleigh had stopped at the door—we listened—the bell rang.

"Ernest!" exclaimed Mary.

"Angus!" said I; but Bridget rapped at Mrs. Talcott's door.

In a moment there came a gentle tap at ours, and Susie Aymar peeped in.

"Oh, girls! Mrs. Talcott is going to have a ride! Come into our room, and see her when she goes out!"

"Who has come for her?" we both asked, eagerly.

"I could n't see his face, but I should think it was a young man."

"What is it?" asked Kitty Russell, opening her door.

"One of Mrs. Talcott's admirers has come to take her out riding," answered Susie; "a tall young man, probably whiskered and mustached, though I could n't see plainly. Don't you admire her taste?"

"Exceedingly!" replied Kittie; "she improves in that respect as she grows older!"

"Kittie, you should n't speak so!" remonstrated gentle Mary; but Kittie said she meant no disrespect—on the contrary, her remark was complimentary, in a high degree.

"They say," continued Susie, "that Mr. Talcott was as old as the hills when she married him, and—"

The sentence was suddenly cut off by the appearance of our little teacher, who, as Susie disappeared, told me that Mr. Holmes wished to see me in the parlor; then went on, noiselessly, as usual, to her own room.

"Now bundle yourself up in half a dozen shawls and cloaks in two minutes!" was Angus' greeting as I entered the parlor. "I have come expressly to take you home with me; Mrs. Talcott has given her consent—the sleighing is magnificent, and the wind comes straight from the north pole!"

In five minutes I was ready, while the girls flocked to the windows to see me start; it was such a novelty for one of their number to go home in term time. Kittie Russell came into the hall as I was going down stairs.

"Is n't it too bad that we were caught so!" she said. "Susie was frightened half out of her wits, for fear we should get a scolding! but I 'd rather be whipped than to have Mrs. Talcott take no notice of it, when I know she heard it all, and will think we are in the habit of talking so about her! But I know I 'll never do such a thing again!"

Through the wide streets we sped swiftly, amid a perfect sea of sound—the jingling and jangling of sleigh-bells, and the constant whiz of smooth-running cutters, passing down by the river's side away to the base of the hill, around tiny parks sentineled by black trees shorn of their beauty,

intent on seeing all that was fine or admired within the city, carried on by the great tide that rolled ever behind us, nor ebbed, save for us, as we left the gleaming lights for the open country, till the first hours of morning. Wrapped in furs and shawls, the cold wind that whistled past only made me merry; and as Angus was by no means a silent companion, we were almost home before I thought half the distance passed. I had resolved to speak to him about Emily Arnold; but it was harder to introduce the subject than I imagined; so I deferred it till a more suitable season, hoping he might himself allude to it. The water of the brook looked black and cold, bordered with ice and snow—ice that formed about the edges, lying thinly in the stream back from the swift current—snow that lay level on the banks, and drifted on the bridge, bending with its weight the great pine limbs, where slender leaves lay green on the pure, soft white. Across the bridge—along the road—within the avenue we went, and as Angus drew up the reins close by the steps, I sprang out, unassisted, and bade him good-night.

"Not quite so fast, Miss Edith," he called out; "listen a moment. You are to go in and see Mrs. Wesson, etc., and tell them you have come out to spend the Sabbath with us;—that you may run over to see them again before you return, though they must n't expect you."

"But, Angus—"

"Don't say 'but' to me! Come—do as I tell

you, and be back again as soon as possible! Do you suppose I am going to sit here and freeze, waiting for you?"

First I went to Mrs. Newell's room, then to my grandmother's.

"I am sorry," was all she said, when I told her of the arrangement that had been made for me.

Was she really sorry? I was about to say—

"If you wish me to stay with you, I will not go;" for her manner toward me had grown so kind, of late, that I felt a desire to please her; but she, as usual, read the unspoken thought in my face, and answered,

"No, no, child! you will enjoy yourself better with the young people."

"The old house seems pretty lonesome, does n't it, Miss Edith, after being in the city so long?" asked Mrs. Newell, looking out at her door, as I came from my grandmother's room.

"Rather, Mrs. Newell, but it seems like home. I shall come over to-morrow if it is pleasant."

"Do. Are you wrapped up warm, Miss Edith?"

"Very! just see!" and I displayed a thick shawl under my cloak, adding, "I have left another down stairs."

"I was just going off without you!" said Angus, turning down the avenue. "See if I ever wait so long again!"

"You can leave me here," I suggested; "there is a path to the house."

"No, I thank you; I usually punish people in

my own way! I shall not allow you to come here again!"

"Indeed! then I shall come without being allowed!"

We were just at the gate;—a curtain was raised, a light gleamed out on the piazza, and in a moment Emily appeared at the door, shading the lamp with her hand. Winnie was just behind her.

"It 's Gus, of course!" I heard her say; "speak, Em!"

"No; wait a minute;—how the wind does blow!"

"He 'll freeze to death, whoever he is!" said Winnie, in a loud whisper, while Angus busied himself with fastening the horse in a sheltered place.

"Winnie!" I called out, suddenly.

"It 's Edie Brewster!—oh Edie, Edie!" and she flew down the steps, regardless of the great drift between her and us. "O dear! I can't come any further—Gus, do bring Edie—"

The last words were lost in the snow-drift; and while Emily came to the rescue, and Angus left his horse to attend to his sister, laughing loudly at her pitiful plight, I stepped from the sleigh, and found the path to the side-door, meeting Mr. Armstrong, whose curiosity had been excited by the hubbub without. Opening the door, I glanced hastily over the deserted room, with its table, and work-stand, and shaded lamp—its arm-chair, and

low rocking-chair by the fireside, and was proceeding to divest myself of cloak and shawls, when Angus entered with Winnie in his arms, Mr. Armstrong and Emily following close behind.

There were exclamations on all sides, and much hurrying hither and thither, and many questions asked, and a great deal of excitement, and some confusion, while Winnie shook the snow from her clothes, and Angus stamped it off his boots, and Emily brought dry slippers, and drew chairs near the newly-replenished fire for us cold ones.

"Why did n't you come sooner?" was Winnie's first question, which I answered by giving a full account of all we had seen since leaving the Seminary; of the streets we had passed through, and the squares we had compassed, and the pedestrian friends we had met, and the Thursday-evening callers who dashed past us in sleighs, with bright-eyed, red-cheeked ladies, probably Madame Girardin's pupils.

Meanwhile, Mr. Armstrong having decoyed Angus away to his study, Emily busied herself about her little stand, which, at the conclusion of my narration was drawn up before the fire, laden with biscuit, and cake, and mince-pie.

To this feast, Angus, though twice invited, refused to come; and as we thus sat alone, Emily told me how intimate her brother and the young pastor had become—what long letters they wrote, school-boy fashion; and lastly, how all the people, old and young, loved Mr. Armstrong, and feared

lest a snare should be laid for him in some vacant city pulpit, and so he should be decoyed away from them.

While she was speaking, the sound of sleigh-bells heard faintly ringing in the distance, came near, and nearer, and at length ceased before the gate, Emily, Winnie and I silently exchanging glances as we listened.

Angus heard it too—and, remembering that his horse was standing in the way, and exposed to the chilly night-air besides, he caught his overcoat and cap—the one that concealed his features so effectually at our first meeting—and rushed out. Emily followed, with a lamp, which the first gust of wind extinguished, and before it could be relighted, Mr. and Mrs. Keene entered.

Giving each a hand, she led them to seats by the fire, directing Winnie to bring her a lamplighter; but she, with something of her old childish glee, threw her arms around Mrs. Keene's neck, repeatedly kissing her, saying, over and over again,—

"Oh! I am so glad, so very glad to see you!"

"Why, child?" she asked, gently putting her from her. But Winnie had no reason to give, and was satisfied to sit the rest of the evening with one hand in hers, and one in mine, talking sometimes with one, sometimes with the other, or dreamily listening to our conversation, with her eyes fixed on the fire.

When Angus came in, Emily sent him for Mr. Armstrong, who immediately obeyed the summons,

and took the arm-chair that stood partially shadowed, yet in full view of the group.

Eddie sent "all his love" to that quiet, thoughtful-looking man sitting in dear father Holmes' chair, beside which I had so often drawn my footstool, and listened to his words of love, dear words, that those lips could utter nevermore!

As I thought, I sighed: but looking up, and catching a glimpse of the smile on Mr. Armstrong's face, that played about his mouth, and settled in the very depths of his dark eyes, giving to them a new beauty and a new power, I aroused myself, and listened, with the rest, to Eddie's playful messages, which his father delivered mostly.

Full in the red fire-light sat Mrs. Keene, and over her face shadows innumerable flitted, across her mouth, up to her earnest eyes, aslant her broad forehead, resting on the quiet, folded hands, with one of Winnie's between, as a gleam of light quivered about her eyes, or touched the thick folds of brown-black hair. Those earnest eyes were very fine, a shade of sadness made them beautiful; excepting these, she was plain, even to homeliness, yet so fascinating, withal, that I could watch her changing expression for hours. There was character in every feature, position, motion—character in every word, tone, smile. When "Harrie" said "No," she meant no; when she said "It must be," there was no alternative. A fine, fearless, intellectual woman was she, endowed with energy, decision, and a good degree of gentleness: but what

was it that had already cast such a shadow over her life?

It was a problem I could not solve.

What wonderful attractions are there in a fire on the hearth, for eyes that might otherwise be wandering elsewhere!

This comment I made to myself, as I glanced occasionally toward the occupant of the arm-chair opposite, who, when all ceased speaking, fell into a seemingly dreamy mood, apparently thinking of nothing but the embers glowing, and dropping to ashes.

Emily, probably, thought him given to reverie, Winnie thought nothing about it, but I fancied Mrs. Keene had noticed the change, slight as it was, in his expression. And so, indulging in various moods myself, and studying those of others, listening to Emily's suggestions, and Angus' outspoken thoughts, the evening passed—the old clock in the kitchen struck ten—Mr. and Mrs. Keene said good-night to all—Angus slipped off with Mr. Armstrong to the study—Emily covered the embers with ashes, and we three, as of old, went up stairs together.

A little before daylight Emily rapped at our door, "Come, girls, if you want to see a fine snow-storm."

"Oh, dear! I 'm so sleepy!" sighed Winnie. "What is it snowing again for? there is enough already to last a month! Emmy," she called, raising her voice, "is Gus awake?"

"Yes, we are all up but you two; come—we are waiting for you."

"Don't you believe that!" cried Angus from the kitchen; "we would n't have you see what we are doing for the world!"

"What are they doing, Emmy? tell us."

"No, no; you must come and see!" and Emily went down stairs.

"Hurry, Edie!" said Winnie, dressing, as usual, hastily and carelessly; and before I was half ready, she disappeared through the door, calling out, "I 'll be back in a minute, and tell you!"

At the foot of the stairs she stumbled over something—probably a footstool or chair, placed in a convenient position; and with an—

"Ah, Gus! that 's too bad!" opened the kitchen door. For a moment, all was silent; then she came hurrying back.

"What was it, Winnie?"

"Oh! nothing but a mountain of a snowball, higher than the well-curb, that he has been rolling up just for exercise! He was delighted to think that that had called me down."

After breakfast, Emily read, as usual, from the old family Bible, and Mr. Armstrong knelt in the same spot where dear father Holmes used to stand at prayer. But I missed the patriarchal tone—the earnest pleading for spiritual blessings for his children. True, there was much of Paul, and much of the beloved disciple in the young pastor; but that other one, passed beyond the skies,

seemed so holy, as I remembered him—saintly, as I knew him to be now, that neither Paul, nor John of old, nor any of His disciples on earth, seemed so like their Master.

After prayers, Angus and his friend withdrew together; Emily washed and put away the breakfast dishes, and swept, and dusted, and Winnie brought her work-basket, drawing a low chair close by the window, and placing one for me opposite.

"How very industrious Winnie is, lately!" I remarked to Emily, watching the busy fingers as they worked with unwonted zeal.

One of my auditors blushed, and smiled—the other sighed.

Without, the snow fell steadily; it came in tiny flakes, indicating, according to Mrs. Newell, a long storm. So I told Winnie; and she laid down her work to look up at the tiny specks of white, floating in mid-air, each adding its mite to the treasury below.

"See, how beautiful!" she exclaimed; "so feathery the flakes are, and pure, and soft! Emmy, do stop a moment, and look at them."

"I never could see much poetry in a snow-storm," answered the elder sister, good-humoredly; "the flakes fall steadily—some are large and some small;—they are going to make very bad walking some of these days."

"Oh, Emmy! don't think such terrestrial thoughts! I 'm up among the white specks now!

Hearken, sister mine, while I tell you something very beautiful;" and still looking above the trees, whose bare limbs caught meager portions of the thickly falling snow, she repeated in a soft, low tone,

"'Peacefully, dreamily, slowly,
It comes through the halls of the air,
And bows its head like a spirit
That kneels in its beauty at prayer.

"'Mid the sere leaves it layeth its forehead,
When the winds are murmuring low,
And telling the beads she hath brought them—
The beautiful spirit—the Snow!'"

Emily turned away before she finished: I saw that there were tears in her eyes—and in a moment Winnie asked,

"What is it, Emmy? tell me."

"I was thinking of one who is lying underneath the 'sere leaves'—" She hesitated, stood still a moment, as if trying to command herself, then suddenly turned, and passed out of the room. Winnie bent her head over her work, and I tried very hard to force back the quick gush of tears, but they fell in great drops on my hands.

Presently Emmy came back, and taking her work, seated herself near us.

"We need not avoid speaking of father, dear girls," she said; "we all know how very dark were those dark days, but there were brighter ones before them;" and she repeated many incidents of

his life, till he seemed only a little removed from us—just hidden from sight, because too pure for earthly eyes to look upon, but present to each spirit.

"Oh, what a day to go to church!" exclaimed Winnie, raising the curtains early on Sabbath morning. "I don't believe any of us but Mr. Armstrong and Angus will go, and I wanted you so much to hear Mr. Armstrong preach! He has improved very much, lately; and you know he always writes fine sermons."

"Perhaps he will keep those he has prepared for a pleasanter day," I suggested.

"Oh, no, indeed!" answered Winnie, quickly. "He always says when people go to church in stormy weather, they ought to hear the best sermons."

"Just like Mr. Armstrong!"

"Is n't it! Emmy thinks he is one of the best men that ever lived!"

The snow drifts were so many and so deep between the parsonage and the church, that, as Winnie predicted, only two of our number ventured out.

But Mr. Armstrong promised to preach for us in the evening; so, after watching them till they disappeared down the path, we gathered around the fire, alternately reading and talking till noon.

"Now, Edie, tell me a good, long story, please," said Winnie, throwing down her book, and laying

her head in my lap. "Looking at the fire makes me so sleepy, and looking out on the snow makes me so blind, and I don't want to read."

"But I don't know any Sunday stories. Emily probably has twenty that she could tell now."

"Oh! I heard all hers a dozen years ago! make up one—I always like to hear any thing original. You can't? Well, then, sing to me; oh, do sing! you and Emmy together, and I will dream a dream for you. Sing 'Time is winging us away;' or 'I would not live alway;' that is Mr. Armstrong's favorite."

Being thus entreated, Emily sang; but long before she ceased, Winnie dropped asleep, and proceeded so far in dream-land, that when Mr. Armstrong and Angus returned in the afternoon, it was several moments before she could retrace her steps, and find her way through the gate by which she entered.

After tea came prayers; and then, as soon as the lamps were lighted, Mr. Armstrong read us his two sermons, sitting, as usual, by the fire-side, in the great arm-chair.

Angus said we could never appreciate them, unless they were delivered from a pulpit; and if we would all assist him, he would make an extempore one; but our preacher demurred, and his zealous friend for once yielded.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Winnie, as the clock struck nine; "the evening is almost gone, and you are going back to-morrow morning!"

"Perhaps the paths will not be broken," suggested Emily.

"Why, of course not; why did n't I think of that! and possibly they may not be under two or three days."

"Possibly, not in a week," said Angus, from his corner; "you Maplewood people are not particularly public-spirited. Suppose we start to-morrow morning, Edith, and redeem the character of the place by breaking a path."

"Very well."

Winnie hereupon remonstrated, declaring it would be the "highest height" of absurdity for us to think of such a thing; and, as Angus did not contend with her, she took it for granted that he had adopted her opinion.

But the next morning, when he left his room a half hour earlier than usual, she could not refrain from calling out,

"Gus, where are you going?"

"Down stairs."

"You know what I mean! where are you going to-day, that you must be up so early?"

"Oh, somewhere! and if you are not down soon you may not have a chance to say good-by."

Winnie's lamp was lighted in a moment, though she was very sure that he was n't going any where.

"You certainly would n't think of going with him, Edie! It 's a perfectly Greenlandish day! The water is frozen solid in the pitcher, and the windows are covered with frost."

"Why are you in such haste to dress if we are not going?"

"I want to have a good long day with you?"

"Do you think you will have?"

Winnie hesitated. She was almost certain that Angus's plans were laid for the day, and in that case she knew the impossibility of changing them; but she evidently did not wish it to appear that she thought so. It was a hard question to answer. Just at this crisis Emily entered.

"Angus says he must start for the city in about two hours, so I thought I would call you early."

"Oh, Emily!" remonstrated Winnie, as if the decree had gone forth from her sister's lips, instead of those of her brother.

"I should like to have them stay a whole week longer, Winnie, but Angus says it is necessary for him to return, and if I am not mistaken, Edith said Mrs. Talcott would expect her to-day; and you know it will be fine sleighing in the city."

"We shall have a vacation at Christmas," I said, with a view to console her, "and that will be in two or three weeks."

But she said it would be a full month before the holidays, and by that time she should forget half she wanted to tell me.

"Don't keep Edith here in the cold talking about it!" said Emily, so we went down to the kitchen-fire, near which Mr. Armstrong and Angus were seated in close conference.

"I think it is going to storm," said Winnie, who

had not yet become entirely reconciled to Angus' decision. "See how dark the clouds look!"

"Do they? I had n't noticed them—then we must be off as soon as possible," said Angus, rising.

Winnie looked provoked. She knew he said it to tease her, and she was n't in a mood to be teased; but as he was going so soon, she tried to smooth down her ruffled temper—a task in which he lent no assistance.

At eight o'clock the sleigh was at the door—the good-bys were all said, and the scores of last words all spoken. Winnie had forgotten something that she was intending to tell me, but promised to write when she thought of it. Emily placed two hot bricks in the bottom of the sleigh, to keep our feet warm, and folded my shawl about me with motherly care. Mr. Armstrong ran up to his study for a volume he wished to lend Angus; and as we started, Winnie called after us, to give her love to all the girls.

A heavily-loaded team had evidently passed over the road before us; so we lost the pleasure of breaking a path for ourselves.

"I must go to grandmother's a moment," I exclaimed, as Angus was turning in the opposite direction.

"Oh, nonsense! the avenue will be blocked up with snow," he answered, still driving on.

I had several thoughts on the subject, but said nothing. For several minutes we rode in silence.

"See how beautifully the trees look!" he sud-

denly exclaimed, as we passed a portion of the road where pine-trees grew in perennial greenness, their tops capped, mountain-like, with snow.

I said nothing. Presently the dead limbs, broken off by the storm, and scattered along the road, attracted his attention.

"How are we going to get by these, Edith?" he asked, stopping short for a moment; then, skillfully turning his horse out of the path, he carefully avoided each one.

I closed my lips more firmly than before.

For the next two miles he drove on, apparently forgetful of my presence. It pleased me, for now I knew that he guessed the cause of my silence.

Farther on, where the road lay through the open country, and only here and there a tree cast its phantom shadow, the wind had swept unresisted, drifting the snow before it, piling it hill-high in the distance, leaving only in and about the path the shining crust that lay there a week ago. We were going very swiftly—flying past the brown houses scattered at long intervals, weather-beaten way-marks, telling tales of by-gone times, to those who chose to hear—when my long-silent companion, with a quick motion, drew up the reins. The horse thus suddenly checked, sprang to one side, and the next moment I was lying in the middle of the road. Angus, with one hand still retaining the reins, lifted me up, shook off the powdering of snow, picked up my shawl, the buffalo-robes, and the two bricks; putting first me, and then my surroundings, in ap-

propriate places in the sleigh, lastly brushing the dampness from his overcoat, and picking his hat from the drift on the opposite side.

"What was the matter, Gus?" I asked, as soon as I had breath to speak.

"Matter? I have an idea that we were upset!"

"So have I! but what was the cause?"

"My horse got out of the road."

"But why did you stop him so suddenly?"

"For good reasons."

"But," I persisted, "what made him spring out of the road?"

"The right rein."

I looked up. There was a satisfied expression about his mouth, and a peculiar, unmistakable light in the blue eyes that never once looked at me.

"Did you do it on purpose, Angus?"

A sudden burst of laughter, loud and long-continued, was my only answer.

"I 've a great mind not to speak to you again!" I said, when he became quiet.

"That 's right! Go on, Charley, till you come to that great drift!"

I could see the drift plainly in the distance, and had no idea of being plunged into it, as an antidote to silence.

"You would not dare do it!" I said, gathering up for an armor all my dignity, which had been so shaken and jarred, that I was unable to buckle it about me. But Angus dared do any thing—so

he asserted, and I believed, without evincing my faith.

"I have lately found out something about you," I began, speaking slowly, in order to prolong the conversation till the fearful point in the road was passed.

"Nothing very wonderful, I presume!"

"Of course not!"

"How very bright our Edith is getting to be! Now say something else!"

"There is no necessity for my speaking again—we have gone by that great drift!"

"But there are plenty more, lying, like all events in the future, soon within reach, though now out of sight."

"And I never trouble myself about possibilities."

"Till they become probabilities, eh? What is that you have heard about me?"

"Nothing."

"But you said—"

"I said I had found out something about you."

"Tell me! I'll never whisper it to any body, as true as I live and breathe."

"You might—I'll not trust you now; so stop teasing—you know you never accomplish any thing by it—you upset me in the snow, too!"

"But I chose a fine place. If you had had some people to deal with, Mr. Armstrong, for instance, or some others I could mention, they might have precipitated you into the middle of that drift, where

you would have gone down out of sight in a moment!"

I laughed at the ludicrousness of the idea.

We were just entering the city, upon whose roofs and spires the sun shone, dazzling our eyes with its reflected brightness. Piled up in masses, but as yet unsoiled, the snow lay, thrown in great shovelfuls from the pavements: past us, in the broad beaten track, the sleighs glided; and away in the distance, through the streets that ran by every door, the bells rang a chorus to the heart-song of those who looked out on the bright morning.

"Now," said Angus, as we stopped at the seminary gate, "be a good girl, and forgive me, and tell me *that* next time."

"Oh, Gus! instead of a son of Adam, you ought to have been a daughter of Eve!"

XVI.

WINGED weeks were those that preceded the holidays. Four times in their course came Ernest —twice on reception-evenings, twice to see Mary after study hours were over; and Mrs. Talcott, yielding to her gentle pupil's request, allowed me, her chosen friend, to share with her the pleasure of those evenings.

Through the dreams of the long winter nights, Ernest floated, ever half divine! Sitting beside my school-room window, intent on a difficult theorem, each shadow flitting across the book brought visions of that head, beautiful in symmetry, with a coronal of grape-leaves resting on the dark hair above the pale forehead and eyes of night. The wind, sighing and sobbing about the casement, at long intervals dropped to a whisper, breathing that one sweet sound—"Ernest!" even the rain and sleet, drifting harshly, beat "Ernest!" against the window panes.

I dreamed through philosophy, chemistry, geometry; but they were dreams that could not be recited, and so I lost my standing in the class.

Christmas came all too soon; but it brought

with it a storm of mingled snow and rain, that prevented us from leaving the seminary.

"My dear young ladies," said Mrs. Talcott, assembling us all in her room before noon, "I presume you are all disappointed in being confined within doors this Christmas-day, to which you have so anxiously looked forward. But I have a plan to propose for the evening, which may be pleasing to some of your number (glancing toward Kittie Russell, who stood near her). I suppose you all know that the school rules are abolished for the day. After dinner, you may go to the large closet in the attic, where you will find hanging on the hooks, and packed in a large covered basket, old-fashioned dresses, bonnets, caps, etc. Select such of these as you please, remembering to leave the rest in order, and carry them to the school-room. Then you can decide for yourselves on charades suitable for the occasion, and if you like we will finish with tableaux."

"Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Talcott!" replied half a dozen voices at once; "but what shall we do for an audience," asked Kittie.

"I will attend to that, my dear; so now go and amuse yourselves till dinner-time."

All the short afternoon busy feet trampled up and down the attic-stairs, whispered consultations were held in the halls, and sounds of merry laughter oozed out through the crevices of the school-room door.

The folding-doors of the parlors were thrown

wide open, and a crimson curtain was hung in their place. Just at dusk, the arrangements were completed, and the girls flocked up stairs, going from one room to another to talk over the whole matter, and wonder who were to compose our audience.

The long waited-for hour at length arrived, and one by one we entered the front parlor to meet a score of guests, some of whom were our Thursday evening callers—others, lady friends of Mrs. Talcott's, living near by. Angus was there, and Ernest; they would be an audience for me at any time; and, afterward, in the parts assigned me in charades, I saw only them.

At first, all were excited, and not a few confused, and one or two words were but indifferently acted; but as the evening wore away, the later hours gave to most a new impluse; and under its influence, they excelled.

In the first tableau, Kittie represented Ophelia, beautiful in madness, her long hair dressed with straws, and withered flowers, falling over her shoulders.

In the second, a tall brunette appeared as Lady Macbeth, "troubled with thick-coming fancies."

In her left hand she bore a flickering taper, by whose light she seemed searching for the blood-stain of the murdered Banquo; and so clearly were fear and remorse written in the wild eyes, and knitted brows, that one could fancy her whispering,

'Yet, who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? Here's the

smell of blood, still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.'

"I must have an introduction to that girl," whispered Angus to me, as the curtain fell.

"Then you prefer her to blue-eyed Ophelia?"

"Most certainly! What do you say to that, Shelton?"

"That I can not approve your taste," answered Ernest, drawing his chair nearer, and speaking in a low tone. "I have no sympathy with the stern woman's 'undaunted mettle,' but there is something attractive in the gentle madness of the pretty Ophelia."

"Pshaw! Shelton!" and Angus flung out the words contemptuously—"you're womanish! I should like to know the girl who would undertake that character—she must be worth studying."

"Hush! Gus: the curtain is rising, and this is to be the last."

"What is it?"

"'The Angel's Blessing'—don't speak again."

On a low couch spread with folds of soft drapery, lay Kittie—a beautiful child asleep—with one white round arm thrown over her head, the tiny fingers just touching the pillow. A dreamy smile rested on the small, half-parted lips, and a faint flush tinged the soft cheek of the sleeper; while above her bent a shadowy form robed in white, its fair hands extended in benediction. Oh! it was a holy face shaded by the brown hair waving downward,

over the pure folds of drapery—and the eyes were angel-eyes!

I covered my face with my hands—the gathered tears gushed through my fingers. When I looked up, the vision had faded; and in its stead was only the closely-drawn crimson curtain.

"Who was it, Edie?" asked Angus, gently, with his hand on my chair.

"Mary Shelton!" who else could it have been?"

XVII.

"There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there!
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair!"

LONGFELLOW.

"Thus our heart, wounded in its most tender part, troubled in its sweetest, most just and innocent attachments, perceives it can no longer keep possession of itself, and is drawn from itself, that it may advance toward God."

FENELON.

ONCE more I was at Maplewood. Along the road, and up the avenue the great tree-limbs bent and cracked beneath their weight of ice; and from the eaves of the house, and about the windows, spear-like icicles depended.

Mrs. Newell met me at the door, and in answer to my inquiries, told me my grandmother's health had been failing for a week past, and expressed a fear that she could not live till the spring.

Hastily laying off my bonnet and cloak, I went up to her room; but Jane, who was sitting beside the bed, whispered, "She has just dropped asleep;" so I went on to my own little chamber, that always seemed ready to welcome me home.

It was Mrs. Newell's motherly hand that looped up the curtains, and swept, and dusted, and arranged my books, the day before my arrival: there was no need that any one should tell me that—or-

der and neatness followed in her footsteps, from cellar to attic.

Unpacking my large satchel, I arranged its contents in the bureau-drawers, then went down into the parlors and music-room—throwing open the blinds, and putting aside the curtains, till the rooms wore something of a home aspect. Still, the house seemed lonely. I missed Kittie's voice, and Mary's presence, and the gatherings in the study-room, at this hour.

"I will send for Winnie to come and spend the night with me," I said, and was going to my room after writing-materials, when suddenly remembering that I had not yet been to my attic-chamber, I went on up the second flight of stairs, and from my seat in the arm-chair beside the window, looked out on the great pine-trees with slender leaves singly encased in ice, and long limbs bowed downward with its weight; till the stars began to show faintly above them, and bright, billowy clouds in the east, heralded the moon-rising.

Then I went down to Mrs. Newell's room, and forgot my intention of writing to Winnie, while listening to her stories of a time gone by.

How very noble were the people in those old days! how upright! how God-fearing! But now they were grown so wise! it was getting unfashionable for children to study the Catechism in schools! Men were judged rather by their wealth than worth; and so worshiped mammon, as their fathers worshiped God!

People used to be honest in those days—the sixth commandment meant more than "Thou shalt not break into a house and steal by the wholesale" —there were as many ways of stealing then as there were of taking human life.

Then the good old lady told me her own trials, beginning at her youth when a hard-hearted step-mother made life intolerable: for step-mothers were not so fashionable in those days as at the present time, and were supposed to be a peculiar class of persons, set apart, as it were, for the purpose of abbreviating childhood, driving youth into premature old age, and heaping countless indignities on innocent heads.

But Mrs. Newell's husband took her from this erroneously called home, and surrounded her with all the comforts of a simple village life, in the days when people were not above working with their hands; and there was nothing ridiculous in the idea of assisting one's husband, though the assistance might be only a strict system of economy, practiced with self-denial that was no hardship.

Mr. Newell was a merchant—a good man, honest in heart, and consequently in deed; and for many years he prospered. Three dear children were given them; and after they had blessed that home for a few years with their sunny presence, God took them one by one; and the echoes of pleasant voices, and happy laughter, and the sound of little busy feet died out from the old house forever, and left it desolate.

One cold winter night, the sharp cry of "Fire!" rang through the village. Men started from sleep, sprang up at the sound and hastened into the street: women gazed silently from the windows at the mingled mass of smoke and flame, rolling and darting upward, now lighting up the heavens with a lurid glare, now spreading a dun cloud beneath the stars.

In the morning a pile of ruins lay smoking near the old homestead. Women and children, sympathizing and curious, came to gaze, and wonder how the house was saved, looking up at the shingles curled and blackened by the smoke and intense heat.

Mr. Newell was in trouble. Slow to think, and slow to act, weeks passed by, and he lingered about the village, out of employment—not knowing what to do. At length an acquaintance in a manufactoring town hearing of his loss, sent for him to come and establish himself near him, offering any assistance that he might need.

It was hard to leave the old place—hard to leave the village where so many happy years had been spent—hard to leave old friends—very hard to leave the three little sleepers lying side by side in the old burying-ground, and to think that grass and weeds would grow rank where they had planted flowers, and strangers gaze at the little white grave-stones, over which so many tears had fallen.

But it seemed best that they should go: so rent-

ing the old homestead, they went to find a home among strangers.

The acquaintance who had written to Mr. Newell loaned him money with which to commence business, and his credit was good with merchants in the city where he had formerly traded on a smaller scale: so for a time, all went on prosperously.

Studying to repair the loss he had sustained, he followed the advice of this acquaintance and borrowed money for which he mortgaged his homestead, to invest in stocks, flattering himself they would yield a large per centage.

It was a busy, driving town, where he had located himself: the world moved faster—people lived faster than in the village he had left a hundred miles behind. The population was a floating one, like that of most manufacturing towns. Mechanics received their wages but twice a year, buying on credit in the intervals. There were honest men among these, but there were also dishonest ones; and so when pay-day came, and the merchant's bills were sent in, some had gone to a neighboring village in search of work—some to the city: but most of these never returned, and so their uncrossed accounts covered many pages of Mr. Newell's ledger.

With that charity which "thinketh no evil," he sold on trust to many who, without any present means of payment, looked forward to a golden future that only came in dreams.

Credulous by nature, Mr. Newell listened to

the plea of poverty; and accounts ran on for a year or two.

Soon people began to talk about hard times.

Banks refused to discount, and manufactories were closed; consequently no dividend was made to stockholders. Bills became due, and collections must be made—but no one had money to spare.

Not a few disputed accounts that had run for a year or more; and Mr. Newell found to his infinite surprise, that those he had accommodated most, and longest, were first to curse him, not altogether in their hearts, when he asked for a settlement. Selling off his stock of goods at a sacrifice, he closed his business, and sat down at home, sick in body and in mind. Ever upright in his dealings, the thought that others must suffer by him, was insupportable. He died. The homestead went to satisfy the demands of creditors—nothing was reserved.

"It was a dark day to me, Miss Edith, the day when he was buried;" said Mrs. Newell, wiping the glasses her tears had dimmed. There was no bitterness in her tone, only a deep-seated sorrow: but a spirit of revenge arose in my heart. It was expressed in strong hasty words, but she interrupted me.

"Dear Miss Edith, it seems strange that God should allow these things, but we can't see as He sees; and when I feel that I am only a poor blind woman, I go and ask Him to do with me just as

He pleases; and His way, I find, is always the best."

This trust then, was her strength. This was the light in her soul, shining through every feature, illumined her face with perennial cheerfulness, and made bright her lonely way through life.

XVIII.

"The sorrow of all sorrow is remembering happier things."

It was New Year's eve. Sitting by the east window of my room, I watched the moonlight as it fell on the glazed crust of snow, glittering on the ice, and revealing the dark stream flowing between white banks beyond the trees. But my thoughts went wandering back through the storms of November and the hazy days of the earlier autumn, to the bright summer-time, when, with Ernest and Mary, my life was a dream of happiness too beautiful to be realized—a dream that still lingered, bringing the beauty and gladness of summer to crown the desolation of winter.

Then a vision of death passed before me.

A silent room, curtains stirred by the breath of evening, the gray light falling over still features, and a form robed for its last sleep. Then the closing scene:—the open grave, the lowered coffin, dust given back to dust.

I went back to the last New Year. The months seemed placed in a great circle; and, step by step, I ascended from January to March, recounting the pleasant and lonely hours of the winter gone:

descending the warm spring and sunny summer slopes, I lingered long at the thresholds of the city home, and that pleasantest one in the wide-streeted village—Mary's.

Now, on the upward path, I stood at the entrance of a strange year. Its name I knew, but nothing of its history. In the future it would be written—the page was ready—a few hours, and the title would be placed there at the top, and underneath, day after day, the record written.

A sudden rap at my door startled me; and sighing at the unwelcome interruption, I went to open it.

"Mrs. Wesson sent me, Miss Edith; she wishes you to come to her room."

"Very well, Jane, I will be there in a moment."

What can she want of me to-night? I queried, replenishing my fire.

She sat in her arm-chair, in the same position as when I first saw her. But she had changed since then. Her face was paler, if possible, and the thin hands were thinner; even the eyes, I thought, were less cold and stern in their expression.

"Sit down here by me, Edith," she said. (My grandmother never asked favors.) I obeyed.

For a minute or two she remained silent—her eyes closed, her hands resting on the arms of the chair. I, as of old, gazed in the fire.

"Edith," she at length began, "I shall not see another New Year. Sitting here to-night, alone, most of the events of my past life came up before

me, and I sent for you, thinking you might like to hear a part of my history. I have never spoken to you of your mother." I glanced eagerly toward her.

"You have seen the portraits down stairs," she continued; "do you know that you resemble your father?"

"No, ma'am."

"Your features are all like his. The night you came here, six weeks after his death, and sat in that chair opposite—I saw only Hamilton Brewster."

There was a long pause.

"I was born at Havana," she at length began. "My father was a Virginian, my mother a wealthy Creole. Two of my brothers were sent to the United States to be educated: one died on his way home, the other shortly after his return; the third is living at Havana. My father was a stern man: my mother was spirited and passionate: both idolized and spoiled me. I loved a young Cuban —a noble, generous youth he was, but poor. My father heard of our attachment, and forbade his coming to the house. One day I heard that he was sick. I was resolved to see him at all hazards —he might die—and I loved him as my own life. On the way I met my father. 'Where are you going?' he inquired, in a tone I feared. I told him plainly. He merely drew my hand within his arm, leading me toward home. I knew him too well to resist—too well to give utterance to the thoughts

that were burning in my heart. Two days afterward, Ferdinand died."

I fancied there were tears in the black eyes now bent on the fire. The tone in which the last sentence was spoken revealed more than volumes of words. It told all the agony—the despair of a proud, fiery nature.

"Your grandfather was a business friend of my father's, full twenty years my senior. For two or three years he had been often at our house. I knew my father regarded him as a man of worth. He never spoke of his wealth, but when he asked me if I would marry Edward Wesson, I knew that he possessed it. Without a moment's thought, I answered him. The old spirit of revenge had died out of my heart—I was utterly hopeless, and cared for nothing. We were married, and I came here. The place seemed very lonely:—there was no society for me, so I read and studied, day after day, and week after week, till this language became as familiar to me as my mother tongue. I had lived here three years, when my Ferdinand and Edith were born. She was like her father—all gentleness and goodness; he—"

My grandmother hesitated, turned her face from me, and passed her hand over her eyes. Had it been Mrs. Newell, instead of this stern woman, I could not have asked "What?"—strange as it seemed to me that my mother should have had a twin-brother whose name I had never heard. There was a pang sterner than that of sorrow on

the averted face of my grandmother. Her hand dropped slowly to the chair-arm, and for a moment she gazed at the embers on the hearth—then continued her story.

"My father and mother both died before these children were born: my brother was a babe when I saw him last: my husband could not win me to love him. So these children were my all; and all the love that was left within me was given to them. In a few years your grandfather died. Edith was growing up a tall, beautiful, blue-eyed girl. Every one who knew her, loved her. I kept her carefully with me. Emily Holmes was her only playmate; she was a gentle, quiet child, and I could trust my Edith with her. Ferdinand was wild and ungovernable, but full of noble, generous impulses. He was thoroughly Cuban, and I loved him for it. Mr. Holmes married an English woman, who only lived two or three years; and when she died, and he married again, her son went to live with his mother's friends. Once, when he was a mere child, they brought him to see his father. It is nineteen years to-night, since he came the last time."

Again my grandmother paused. How strangely altered she was! Once I fancied her nerves iron—her heart stone. To-night I knew, at least in part, the cause of this sternness: but was it disease that had so weakened her now?

"The young Holmes," she continued, "brought

with him a friend—his senior by seven years. His portrait hangs in the parlor."

Something of the old look gleamed from those eyes, with that last sentence significantly spoken.

"He and Ferdinand were much together; Edith saw, and loved him. I knew nothing of him, and my opposition was strong. I was selfish, too; and could not bear to have her love for me transferred to another. But she pleaded, and I yielded. It seemed like death to give her up—would that it had been, to us both! The three, Brewster, Holmes, and Ferdinand, were much in each other's society. Twice they were absent for several days, at the city. My boy had never been from home so long before: but whatever the others proposed, he was ready to accede to. At length, Brewster announced his intention of returning to England. I was not prepared to part with my child so soon—so suddenly; but she pleaded, and I reluctantly consented. Two days after the vessel sailed, there were strange rumors afloat. Counterfeit bills on the largest city bank had been circulated to a great amount throughout the adjoining towns, and men were in pursuit of the counterfeiters. That night I could not sleep. I was thinking of Edith, and the years that must elapse before I could see her again. Toward midnight, some one passed through the hall. 'Ferdy,' said I, starting up, 'are you there?' In a moment he opened the door, and I could see by the lamp he carried, that his face was very pale. 'I am sorry I disturbed you, mother,'

he said, in his soft, pleasant voice—'I was going down stairs after a book.' 'But,' I remonstrated, 'it is late my son, and you look tired. Don't sit up any longer to-night.' He laughed gayly, but it did not seem like his laugh. 'I'm very well, mother, but wide awake. Good-night, and don't trouble yourself about me.' 'Edith"—and my grandmother's keen eyes were turned full on me—"I have seen friends die—dear friends—and thought life was not worth living without them; but had I laid my children side by side in the coffin twenty years ago, I should be a happy woman to night!"

Her voice grew hoarse, and the long thin fingers were clasped tightly together.

"The next morning, Emily Holmes came to inquire after her brother. He had gone with my Ferdy—and they never saw him again. Do you wonder why I curse Hamilton Brewster? Do you wonder that when his child came here, and looked at me with his eyes, and spoke to me in his tone, I could not love her, though she was the daughter of my dead Edith?"

Suddenly her tone softened. "My child," she said, and extended her hands toward me. Quick as thought, I sat down beside her, and laid my head in her lap. Then a flood of tears that I did not try to check, burst forth; and she—my stern grandmother—passed her hand gently over my head, and soothed me, as if I had been a little child.

"You are not like him," she said, softly; "you are not like him."

"But, grandmother," I pleaded—for her words had given me confidence—"if my father was guilty, I am sure he repented long before he died; he was so kind, so—"

"His repentance came too late," she said calmly; "too late to give me back my heart-broken Edith; too late to save my poor ruined boy! Do not talk to me of his repentance."

Presently she raised my head from her lap, and smoothed back my hair.

"Go to my bureau, my child, and in the second drawer—here is the key—you will find a small ebony box. Bring it to me."

I brought the box and placed it in her hands.

"Take this key, and open it."

I obeyed. In the bottom, lay a sealed letter, yellow with age, and a piece of white paper newly folded.

"The box is yours, Edith; take out the letter, and lock it again. After I am dead, you may open it and read the paper. The letter was inclosed in one from your mother, sent to me when you were a babe. She wished me to take you as my own child, but your father would not give you up. I have kept the letter for you till now."

How I longed, yet feared to break the seal!

"Go now," she said; "it is nearly midnight. I would not read the letter to-night."

"May n't I sit by you, grandmother, till you are asleep?"

"No, no, my child; it is not necessary. Go and sleep yourself."

As I rose to go, she kissed me, holding my hand in both of hers. The clock in the lower hall struck twelve, as I opened the door of my room, knelling the death of the Old Year. One, two, and three, I heard it strike afterward—the first hours of the New Year—and then I fell asleep. Soon, the sudden opening of a door aroused me; a light gleamed by the door, and there were voices in the hall. I listened, and heard Mrs. Newell giving some directions to a servant—I heard Russel, the gardener, talking on the stairs with Jane.

In a moment I was wide awake, and at my door.

"Mrs. Newell, what is the matter?"

"Your grandmother—"

"Is she dead?"

"Oh! Miss Edith, I'm afraid she is!"

Hastily throwing on my dressing-gown, I went to her room. She sat, as I had left her four hours before, in her arm-chair, with her hands folded together; but her head had fallen to one side, and the eyes were fixed and glassy. As I stood bending over her, the physician entered.

"Is she dead sir?" Mrs. Newell asked. His hand was on her wrist, and his eyes fixed on her face.

"She has been dead some time. How long was she left alone?"

"I was was with her till midnight," I answered, "and wished to sit with her longer; but she said it was unnecessary."

"I could not sleep," said Mrs. Newell. "It seemed to me that she was calling, and I went to her door twice, to listen. That was about one o'clock. She was breathing regularly, and I did not go in for fear of disturbing her. At four o'clock I was so restless, and afraid that she might want something, that I got up and went into her room. She was sitting just as she is now, sir."

"Was she as well as usual yesterday?"

"Not quite, sir. She has had a heart affection for a great many years. I was always afraid she would die in her chair."

And so my grandmother died—not with the old year, but in the earliest hours of the new.

XIX.

"'Tis thus in the soul's dark dwelling—
By the moody host unsought—
Through the chambers of memory wander
The invisible airs of Thought.

"For it bloweth where it listeth,
With a murmur loud or low;
Whence it cometh—whither it goeth—
None tell us and none may know.

"Now wearying round the portals
Of the vacant, desolate mind—
As the doors of a ruined mansion,
That creak in the cold night wind."

THE day after the funeral, I sat down alone in my room taking the ebony box that had stood untouched on my table since the morning of the new year.

With trembling fingers I broke the seal of my mother's letter, and glanced hurriedly over the closely written pages; then turned back to the first, and read.

"MY BABY EDITH:—

"Little do you dream of your mother's sorrow at leaving you: even now as I write, you laugh and clap your baby hands—dear hands on which my hot tears fall when I rock you to sleep. It may

be, God will take my darling too, and you will be safe with me in Heaven. Oh if I could only talk to you about that Heaven, and the blessed Jesus—that Good Shepherd who carries the little lambs of his fold in his bosom—but you would not understand me; and I can only consecrate you to God, praying that he will keep you from temptation. . . . . You are going to the home where I spent so many happy years. And, oh may God be with you there, and may all holy influences surround you. A few brief years and you will be a woman; and then, it may be, you will leave your home as I left it: but my precious child, remember a dying mother's words. If you marry, let your husband be a man of Christian principle. It may be you will know the friends I knew. Dear Mr. Holmes may be living, and my best friend, Emily. She was a sister to me: he used to call me his 'little daughter'—he first taught me to love my Saviour. . . . . My child, it may be that you will hear something of my early history before reading this. Your grandmother never loved your father. But I did wrong. Fascinated by him, I was blinded:—I could not—would not believe him to be unprincipled. Remember, my Edith, I do not write this to condemn him: others have erred far more than he; but I wish you to know why I say 'If you marry, let your husband be a man of Christian principle.' I pray that you may never be compelled to endure mental suffering, like this which is wearing my life away."

Much more my mother wrote, of counsel and entreaty, and the deep love she bore for me, her only child. As I read, tears fell thickly on the paper, where her tears had fallen years ago; and kneeling beside my bed, I prayed that I might be good and gentle, like that sainted mother.

Then I arose, carefully reclosed the letter, and opened the paper lying in the bottom of the box.

It was my grandmother's will constituting me sole heir of her property.

The day before my return to school, Winnie spent with me. Emily too came over in the afternoon and staid an hour; and just at dusk, Angus ran up the steps.

"Who wants to have a game at snow-balling with me?" he asked, as we both went to meet him in the hall. "We shan't have so fine an opportunity again—winter is almost gone."

"I, for one!" said Winnie quickly; "Oh, no I don't either, for I always get the worst of it! Oh, how cold it is; come into the parlor."

"Not I! I've been shut up at home all day, and came out for exercise."

"Well, come in a little while," urged Winnie, "and we'll decide on what to do. It's too cold to think here."

"I should think your ideas would keep longer in a frozen state."

"Well, so they do: but must n't they be thawed before I can use them?"

"Go in; and when you get thoroughly warmed, we will take a walk."

"Where?"

"Never mind now."

"But there are no good paths."

Angus said nothing.

"Now I'm warm," said Winnie, holding first one foot, and then the other, toward the fire, "Where are you going, Gus?"

"Oh! along—and around—and—you and Edith get your shawls if you are going with me."

In two minutes we were ready, and went down the avenue one by one, there being only a narrow foot-path through the snow. The moon shone out brightly: the night was clear and cold. When we reached the road, Angus turned to the left.

"Now I know where we 're going," said Winnie, "but I'll not tell, because if I do, Gus 'll go somewhere else."

I knew very well we were walking in the direction of Aunt Nellie's, but said nothing. I had not been at her house since summer.

She lived alone, in a weather-beaten, brown house; and through the warm weather, when she appeared more like her former self, people from the village came to see her, and even little children were not afraid, as in winter, to pass her lonely house.

Not that Aunt Nellie was ever to be feared in her insanity, which manifested itself in words—never tempting her to injure any one; but with

that propensity common among the insane, she kept her head covered with caps and handkerchiefs, underneath which her long gray hair fell straightly to her shoulders.

Witch-like she looked, the children said; and when she stood in her door, talking and singing, her tall figure clad in a faded dress looped up with gaudy ribbons, with her bony hands beckoning to some imaginary shape that could never be prevailed upon to enter, they fled precipitately, and went home across the fields.

As we reached the gate, Angus, with his hand on the latch, exclaimed, in a tone of surprise,

"Aunt Nellie! what is the matter?"

I looked, and saw a dark something—it looked like a bundle—lying on the snow. As he spoke, it began to move, and presently sat upright. For a moment, the cold gray eyes looked at us suspiciously—then the figure burst into a loud laugh.

"Just like ye to come for it! I told Benny, if ever I tried to go, ye 'd come."

"Why did n't you go sooner?" asked Angus, who always fell in with the old lady's whims.

"Don't ye see I 'd started, and my old bonnet did n't look very well; it went on wrong side out, and right side wrong, somehow—crazy it seemed—and that was it. How did you know?"

"Suspected it, Aunt Nellie, only suspected it."

"Glad ye did—that 's the way always."

"But how came you here in the snow?"

"Well, that 's the queerest of it! How was it I

said I did after I put that paper in my pocket! Ye won't any soul of ye tell?—my! I thought there was a hundred of ye by the trampin' when ye come! Has he gone in?—the man in the moon, ye know."

"Yes, long ago. Had n't you better go into the house by the fire?"

"Well, if he 's really gone in, I don't care if I do."

As she rose, and entered the door, we followed, listening to her words, and trying to conjecture what subject she was on.

"There 's chairs around, somewhere," she began, "if they ain't all hid—you find 'em, and sit down."

Accordingly, Angus "found" four; and the old lady, after removing her shawl, sat down with us before the fire.

After a while, she untied her hood and took it off, displaying a bright red handkerchief tied over her head, and only partially covered by a cap trimmed fantastically with yellow and black ribbons, and tied beneath her chin with broad strips of flannel.

"Benny and me did fight," she began, shaking her head, and talking in low tones. "There was the 'stars and stripes,' now, and the cannon. I had n't got much for tea—bread and butter, and the Continentals, and the like o' that. I said I 'd tell him, and I did; and the next time he jined the Britishers, I had the papers made out, all ready, mind ye, but nobody was to know it!—in

my pocket, and not a hole in it; and just as I got to the door, the man in the moon—I told ye, ye know—stepped out and looked at me! Oh my!—I was so—so—the old hood was made of merino—black, was it, or red?—I forget—stars and stripes—yes—seen many a hard battle, that old shawl has—bullets fired straight through it and back again—and just as I got out the door, and see him a-lookin' at me, I turned round and walked backward—it would n't do, you know, to let him see them papers in my pocket!"

"Certainly not," said Angus; "I 'm glad you did so. Was that the reason why you fell?"

"Fell? fell?—yes, that 's the word!"

"What did Benny say when you told him?"

"Say? I wish you knew—I don't pretend to! Benedict Arnold ain't nigh so smart as you think he is. If it had n't a-been for me, he 'd lost every battle—yes, every inch of 'em! There would n't a-been as much left as you could put in a thimble! Folks talk about it—need n't tell me! I 've seen 'em come times enough, a-whisperin', and a-peekin' into the windows and through all the cracks! You need n't tell," continued the old lady, lowering her tone to a whisper, "but what with hangin' up my shawls and dresses afore the windows, and settin' knives and forks up to the cracks, some days I don't have nothin' to wear, nor nothin' to eat off from!

"Now, you see, I 'm situated jist so; and if I go and put on a new silk dress, there ain't man,

woman, or child in the neighborhood, but what 'll have one jist like it. Benny, he spoke about that, too. It was a-ruinin' folks, he said—Continental money wan't good for nothin'; and so, you see, I was obleeged to do as I should n't otherways. I never have told any body, but I may as well tell you—it plagued me a'most to death in the time of it.

"Ye see, I had a new black bonnet with a feather in it—I 'd lost somebody, I guess—and went into mourning. Was it my boy—my boy? —let me think: no, no, that was n't it—they stole my cow, did n't they? Well, I never wore that bonnet but once," here she again lowered her voice to a whisper—"and would you believe it?—the next day, all the men, soldiers and all, come clear round from Germantown a-purpose to come by here—no, it was from Cornwallis' surrender—and every one of 'em had a feather in his hat! If it had been women, I should n't a-took it so to heart; they 're always imitatin'. After that I went to—to sleep:—no, I went and told him; and he declared on 't I should n't stay here. So I got all ready, and that very day I was a-goin' with him he went off and left me. It was all over the army: —mighty tickled some of 'em was—I heerd how they laughed—generals and all—they wan't a bit too good for it—thought it was a pretty fine joke, I s'pose—and some of 'em come clear back that night to call me names."

"But why did n't you threaten to shoot them,

Aunt Nellie?" said Angus; "did n't he leave you a gun?"

"Gun? yes; but they 'd all been shot before, mind ye—it would n't a-hurt 'em a mite! I did something worse than that, though!"

"What was it?" we all asked.

"Why, ye see, they 'd called me every thing they could think of, and along toward mornin' they got out o' names; so they went off a-piece, and sent a sarjent to the general for some more; and when they was gone, I got my clothes-line, and tied it on to the posts, down pretty low; so ye see, when they come a-racin' back, they all pitched over it, head first, officers and all—it did n't make no difference! I thought I should a-died a-laughin'. Some of 'em lost their feathers—and, ye see, I 'd laid straw over the well, too; and when they got up, over some of 'em went into that! There's many a blue coat down there now!—do ye s'pose I 've ever used the water since? ha, ha!"

"I think we must go now, Aunt Nellie," said Angus, buttoning his overcoat; "can I help you in any way about those papers?"

"No, I thank you, sir!" said the old lady, very graciously—"only don't say any thing about it—it 'll all be straight in a few days."

"I never liked Arnold very much," said Angus, "but there 's Anthony Wayne, you know—'Mad Anthony'—he was a brave fellow."

"Brave, is he?—did he jine the Britishers? No?—then he ain't the one—it was somebody else

I said. 'Mad Anthony:'—wan't he a namesake o' mine? I was thinkin' they used to call me some such name—in fun, you know—only in fun; and somebody named somebody after me, they said, but I don't remember as he was any relation."

"Perhaps not," said Angus. "Have you plenty of wood chopped for this month? March is a pretty cold month, you know."

"O, yes, I 'm obleeged to you—we 're very comfortable here. Wait a minute, and I 'll go a little ways with ye—them papers, ye know!"

"O, it will make no difference if you wait till morning:—if it does, I will explain it to him."

"Will ye?" said the old lady, anxiously; "it 's very important."

"Yes, I know," said Angus; "but it 's so light to-night, you might just as well go in the daytime."

"So I will, thank you, so I will!" and the old lady curtesied us out at the door.

"Poor thing!" said Winnie. "I am so sorry for her—but who can help laughing to hear her talk?"

"Poor thing!—she 's happy enough," said Angus. "I 've been there when she was queen of Spain; then she was in her glory, with the old table for a throne, and ribbons enough about her to tie up the village. Sometimes she 's the President's wife, and then her dignity is not to be trampled on. Occasionally she raves about her boy—I was afraid she was going to to-night; but she

seems to talk very little on that subject lately, and is generally pretty happy. She 's forgotten all about her divorce from Arnold before this time."

"I don't blame her for wanting to be free from him," said Winnie. "I think he 's a detestable character!"

"Let 's hear what Edith has to say about that," said Angus, turning to me. "I believe I have heard her express her opinion of Arnold two or three times."

"I admire him very much. He was just such a determined, brave, reckless man, as I like."

"But what about his patriotism, Edie?" asked Winnie.

"It was just what mine would have been. If I had done what he did for his country, and been rewarded as they rewarded him—"

"My dear Miss Brewster," interrupted Angus, "you 're getting warm."

I acknowledged it, and checked myself.

The rest of the evening, we chatted peacefully by the fireside. The next day, I was to return to the city for the summer—for six months to be subject to boarding-school rules, to boarding-school studies, and to dream boarding-school dreams.

For six months, I could see Mary daily, and Ernest, sometimes weekly, sometimes semi-weekly; and with him ever present in my thoughts, I should forget how lonely the great dark house was at the end of the avenue.

Then Mary would go to her own home, and I should return to mine—but what changes there might be in that brief time! I dared not think of it.

Winnie staid with me that night; and when the stage stopped for me early the next morning, Angus and she waved me a "good-by" from the steps.

XX.

"Within my breast there is no light
But the cold light of stars;
I give the first watch of the night
To the red planet, Mars.

"O, star of strength! I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,
And I am strong again."

LONGFELLOW.

How soon the spring came—and then the summer! How suddenly the trees budded, and how early blue violets bloomed in bunches on the hillsides, and yellow dandelions studded the young grass, and grew up along the edges of the pavements. Then the violets grew paler, taking a faded purplish hue, and the dandelions put off their blossoms, and wore downy crests that the wind scattered; the grass grew up rank and tall, and roses, red and white, took the place of the delicate spring flowers.

Soon—as we took our long walks with Mrs. Talcott, or sat in groups on the piazza, or walked together in the garden at the close of the warm days—we began to talk of the parting not far in the future, and to number the weeks and days, even, to the end of the term.

Kittie Russell was inconsolable. All her old friends, she complained, were going—only two besides herself would be left, and they were younger than she. Then a strange set of faces must needs come next term, and new scholars always seemed so queer!

Poor Kittie had many and long crying spells at the dismal prospect; and not even a permission to spend an hour every day in our room could restore her wonted cheerfulness.

"What shall I do without you, Mary?" was the question she asked oftenest, to which the same answer was usually given.

"Do just as you would with me, Kittie."

"But oh, Mary, who will teach me to be good? I can't be good when you are away."

"But I can't make you good, Kittie," Mary would answer, softly; "neither can you make yourself perfect, if you try ever so hard in your own strength."

"Oh, I know what you would say, Mary; but, I can't pray—I believe I am predestined to be lost!"

"But you have no right to believe so, Kittie. If you come to Christ believing on him, and humbly ask him to make you all his own, and then if you live in daily communion with him, avoiding all things wrong, because they are contrary to his commands, and not in order to appear amiable before earthly friends—if you exercise charity toward all, and live to lead others to Christ, you

need never trouble yourself with the fear that you are 'predestined to be lost.'"

"But, Mary, can all be saved if they will?"

"Certainly, Kittie; do you think the Son of God died for a portion of the world, and not for all? and if all will not accept the terms he offers, are not they alone to blame? It seems very plain to me, Kittie, but I don't know as I can make it so to you. Suppose that when you were a little child, you were fretful and ill-humored, though you had every thing to make you happy. Then, suppose, that your father, anxious to make you a better child, one day brought you something you had been longing for, and said: 'Kittie, if you will not be angry, nor fretful, once to-day, you shall have this.' He knew that you could control yourself, but, he also knew from what he had before seen of your disposition, that you would not: so we will say that when he placed this gift before you, promising it to you on these conditions, he knew you would not win it. Did that knowledge of his hinder your obtaining it? Were you not at liberty to act as you chose? Had you not power to control yourself for one day? This foreknowledge of his could not make you peevish, and fretful, if you tried to be happy. It is a simple illustration—perhaps you will say it is not exactly to the point—but it may help you in understanding this: God knew from the beginning, just who would, and who would not accept his offered salvation. That

is, he placed before all men life and death; and left them free to choose for themselves, knowing all the while, that some one would willfully choose death. God will not deprive men of their free agency, and compel them to be holy, but he places before them the strongest inducements to a life of holiness. If they then choose a life of disobedience to his commands, and so peril their soul's salvation, is it because they are 'predestined to be lost?'"

During these conversations, I sat apart from Mary and Kittie, apparently engrossed in a book; and the dear, gentle girl knew nothing of the influence she was daily and hourly exerting over me. Like Kittie, I felt that I could not "be good" away from her.

At length, the end of the term came. By noon, the examination was over; and all went to the school-room, or to their own rooms, to write "parting notes." It was a long-established custom among the scholars, to write to each other at the close of every term, a note to be read on the way home; but as so many were going, not to return, the notes were longer, and more affectionate in their tone than usual.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, they were finished, and distributed: then by twos and threes the writers withdrew—some to the arbor—others to their own rooms.

"Oh, Edie!" said Kittie, following me up stairs, "isn't it too bad, to think that Mrs. Talcott has

invited company here this evening! and we must be agreeable, and smile, when we want to cry all the while!"

"Is it too bad, my dear?" said a pleasant voice behind us. Kittie turned quickly.

"Oh, Mrs. Talcott! I feel as if I could n't speak to any body; my heart is in my throat all the while; and if I look at any body, I cry!"

"Why, my dear child, that is n't right. Don't you suppose I feel badly, to part with so many of my adopted children? But I hope to see them all, a great many times in this world. We should not spend our time in useless regrets. You have dwelt so long on this, my dear, that you are getting very nervous. Now command yourself; and brush away those tears. I want you to remember this evening hereafter as a very pleasant one; so don't make yourself and others miserable over what can not be helped."

"I will try to control myself, Mrs. Talcott," said Kittie, with a fresh burst of tears, indicating that she had not yet commenced her efforts.

"Do you know how many are to be here this evening," I inquired, as we entered our room, trying to give a new direction to her thoughts.

"No," said Kittie, sadly; "but there will be a great many more than—"

With a sudden effort she checked herself. How unlike the impulsive Kittie of old! Mrs. Talcott had requested her to control herself; and though it was a severe self-denial, she was trying. How

gentle, and loveable she was, after all such attempts at subduing self!

There were still traces of tears on her face, when Susie Aymar, and Ellen Willard—the "Lady Macbeth," of Christmas tableaux memory—entered.

"Edith Brewster, what are you going to wear?" was the first question, as Susie's head appeared within the door.

"We are in the greatest trouble in our room!" said Miss Willard. "No one knows whether Mrs. Talcott wants us to dress in white, or in colors—"

"And then about gloves," interrupted Susie; "shall we wear them, or not? What dress are you going to wear?"

"I have n't yet decided. I don't have to choose between colors, you know."

"Well, do tell me what to do!" and she displayed three dresses lying across her arm. "There's my white—but it 's low in the neck, you know, and not very becoming. How do you like my pink tissue? Too showy, is n't it? I think so. And this other one is n't any thing—I don't know what I brought it in for!"

"As you have objected to them all what can I say? I must either agree with you, in not liking any of them, or else set up my opinion in opposition to yours. You have put me in a place where I can't be polite if I try."

"Well, what shall I do?" asked Susie, with a doleful laugh.

"Why, ask Mrs. Talcott."

"I? I would n't do it for the world! Hark! I thought I heard her coming!"

"Well, what if you did?" said Miss Willard, quickly; "is that any thing to be frightened at? You are the queerest girl!"

"Not a bit queerer than you are," retorted Susie. "I 've a great mind to tell of something you did the other day!"

I foresaw the evil. There was about to be a scene; and, exerting myself to change the subject, I inquired,

"Do you know how many invitations Mrs. Talcott has sent?"

"No," said Susie. "Do you? There may be a hundred here for any thing I know. Bridget told me all the Thursday evening callers were invited; and Professor Henry's Irish girl told her that the Professor and his wife, and their three daughters were coming—I don't know but she has asked the whole college!"

"I 'd be ashamed to find out by a servant!" said Ellen, who had not forgotten Susie's unkind threat; "would n't you, Edith?"

I was thinking how I could best soothe the aggrieved ones, when Mrs. Talcott spoke to one of the scholars, close by our door, with her hand on the knob.

In a moment Susie seized her dresses, and before any one could speak, shut herself up in the closet.

"I 've a great mind to expose her!" whispered Ellen.

But I was very sure she would not do it, for they were, in the main, good friends; and would each undergo a self-inflicted penance of tears and regrets in half an hour's time.

"Oh, don't!" said Kittie; "that would be so unkind!"

Mrs. Talcott had never appeared more pleasant than on this afternoon. I thought of the time when I first came with Winnie to the seminary, and gave my opinion of its Principal.

Too dignified and precise, I called her, for her size—and that was quite too small for a teacher. How wonderfully people's opinions do change!—sometimes in the course of a few months, or weeks, or even days.

Kittie exerted herself to appear cheerful, and Mrs. Talcott smiled her approval. But poor Susie! The closet was small, and well filled with dresses—the day oppressively warm. What could she do? It was the question she had asked me so many times:—it was now my turn to ask it—but neither she nor I could give an answer.

Presently, Mary entered the room, warm with the exercise she had been taking.

"I thought I should n't be able to find—" observing Mrs. Talcott, she suddenly checked herself.

"Go on, my dear."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Talcott—I would rather not. It is nothing wrong."

Both smiled, and for a moment, no one spoke.

Each one of the scholars had prepared a parting gift for our teacher, and Mary had been in quest of materials with which to finish hers.

"How very warm it is here!" she said, at length, loosening her bonnet-strings. "Would n't you like a fan, Mrs. Talcott? Edith, why did n't you get my palm-leaf in the closet?"

Her hand was on the door as she spoke; but, as she opened it, she started back.

"Why, Susie! how you frightened me! What is the matter?"

Poor Susie stood—an image of distress, with her dresses still across her arm, covering her face with her hands, while the tears trickled through her fingers.

I took it upon myself to explain.

"Come here, my child," said Mrs. Talcott; "why are you so afraid of me? Did you think I came in with any intention of injuring you?"

But Susie could not speak.

"Be more frank, my dear, and not so fearful. It will cause you a great deal of unhappiness if you cultivate this disposition. Now let me see your dresses. I think the white one is very pretty, and very suitable; but use your own judgment about it, and don't shed another tear to-day."

After the tea-bell rang, as soon as it was ascertained that Mrs. Talcott had left her room, a committee of three entered it quietly, and deposited fifteen packages of various sizes and shapes on the table.

Bread and butter, and crackers and cakes, were quite superfluous, and remained on the table very much as they were when the tea-bell rang.

We were all in our rooms before Mrs. Talcott came up stairs. How eagerly the committee—and it may be, some others—listened to hear her door open! It seemed as if she had never before staid below so long.

We had finished dressing for the evening, when she sent for us all to come to her room.

Her acknowledgments were never wordy; but, as she passed from one to another with a kiss and a "thank you," each felt that her little gift was acceptable, and that the love which prompted its bestowal was appreciated.

Julia Arnold was among the invited guests of the evening. She was visiting a friend in the city, and Mrs. Talcott, hearing of it, sent for her only the night before. I hoped she would not come. On what terms could I meet my old enemy, should she be present?

I could not tell.

The hour appointed arrived, and we sat in expectation in the parlor.

"Oh, how stiff it is!" every one said.

First came a delegation from the medical college; but Angus was not one of the number.

Two or three evidently came prepared to talk—two or three to listen. The listeners sat near Susie Aymar and Ellen Willard, yet scarcely within conversing distance.

Kittie was trying to entertain them, and they apparently tried to be entertained; but there were so many silent ones, it was very hard to talk.

Susie and Ellen said the same things over and over again, and were imitated by two or three groups in other parts of the room.

When Professor Henry entered with his wife and daughters, there was a profound silence.

"Pleasant evening this, madam," he said, extending his hand to Mrs. Talcott, as she rose to meet him.

"That is n't original," whispered Kittie, "for I heard every one of those six Medics say it—it 's been from one end of the room to the other."

Kittie had left her listeners, after introducing them to Susie and Ellen, and now sat beside me.

"Oh, dear!" said I; "I wish Angus would come!"

"He can talk, can't he?" said Kittie.

"Yes, indeed!"

"I wish he would come, too. Who is that?" she asked, suddenly—"and where did he get in? I wonder if Burnham did n't send him as his representative?"

Burnham was a medical student—a very thorough scholar, it was said, though by no means brilliant.

He was unaccustomed to society—a very awkward man, invariably placing himself in the most conspicuous position in the room. For what particular reason he called, no one knew: perhaps

it was because he formed the habit early in the summer. As it was, not a reception evening passed without finding him at his post, yet never making an attempt at conversation with any one, unless so closely cornered that retreat was impossible.

The girls said he was intrusted with a secret that he was continually fearful of disclosing if he opened his lips.

But Mrs. Talcott always spoke of him in the highest terms. He was intelligent, she said, and unassuming; worth more than three ordinary students.

"Burnham's representative," as Kittie styled the man who appeared suddenly in the room without being seen to enter, sat between the folding-doors, in full view from both rooms; uneasily moving his feet, and placing his hands in different positions, each of which appeared more unsatisfactory than the preceding.

Just at this juncture, Ernest entered, and soon after, Angus. For a few moments they conversed with Mrs. Talcott, then came to the sofa where Kittie was sitting with me. Engrossed in conversation, I paid no particular attention to the various arrivals, and even forgot that Miss Arnold was expected, till just as Ernest left me to speak with Mary, she entered.

Never had she looked more magnificently beautiful than now—dressed in thin white muslin that left bare her snowy throat and fair round arms,

while her soft dark eyes shone star-like. For a moment she stood in the center of the room with Mrs. Talcott, then turning toward the corner where I sat, extended her hand to Kittie.

There was a peculiar grace in every movement of that little hand so faultlessly formed: even tight gloves did not cramp the taper fingers that were beautiful in every position. Should I accept that pretty little hand, half-offered to me? Pride said loudly "No! no! no!" but at the same moment a something better whispered once in soft low tones —"Yes;" and pride shrank back baffled, yet not destroyed.

As she passed by, Ernest still absorbed in conversation with Mary did not see her: when he returned to me, she was in the back parlor.

"Oh, Edie!" again whispered Kittie, have you been watching Burnham's representative? He 's in a comfortable position now—look—with his chair tipped back against the door:—if any body should touch him ever so softly he would change his location more suddenly than would be desirable! I think somebody ought to make Yankee chairs with two legs: what a superfluity the front ones are!"

"But when a person leaves a chair," I suggested, "it stands better on four legs."

"No, no," said Winnie, "it should be left leaning against the wall, or made to stand in that position in the middle of the room, ready for the next

comer. Look! there 's the Professor, leading Julia Arnold to the piano!"

As she touched the keys, I saw Ernest's eyes fixed on her; and while she played, he sat like one entranced.

"Who is she?" he asked, as she rose surrounded by a score of admirers.

"Miss Arnold; a former pupil of Mrs. Talcott's."

"Do you know her?"

"Too well," rose to my lips: I checked it and answered "very well."

"Then you will introduce me?"

"Certainly."

It required some effort to answer promptly: I did not like to see him so easily attracted by a beautiful face: but then, Julia was not what she seemed to be; her charms were those of a marble statue.

"She will be forced to acknowledge that she can not fascinate him, and then shall I not triumph over my enemy!" Elated with the thought, I took his offered arm, led him to the piano near which Julia stood, and presented him to her; then went back to Kittie with Angus, who affirmed he had heard so much flattery within the last five minutes, that it would be delightful to call somebody hard names.

"I am glad Edith has brought you back;" said Kittie, "that Mr. Shelton that she carried off just now, did nothing but talk to her about things I

couldn't understand. I'm glad he's gone—we'll see how he and Miss Arnold are pleased with each other."

One after another joined us, and after conversing a few minutes, passed on: but Ernest still remained with Julia. Now I knew that the solitary man between the folding-doors had attracted their attention: he knew it also. It was unkind—cruel; and I was angry.

It is true I had myself remarked on him, but it was not within his sight or hearing:—I could never coolly wound another's feelings.

"Angus," I said, impulsively, turning toward him, "do you know that gentleman sitting between the two rooms?"

"I was introduced to him, when I first came in."

"Will you introduce Kittie and me?"

Angus started. "Have you fallen in love with him within the last minute?"

"Perhaps so, and perhaps not: will you introduce us?"

Kittie looked wonderingly at me. "Are you in earnest, Edith?"

"Certainly; will you go with me?"

"Yes, if you wish me to."

"Miss Brewster—Miss Russell—Mr. Hall;" said Angus as we stood beside him.

Mr. Hall blushed perceptibly—half rose—then resumed his former position as we seated ourselves beside him. I knew how near Ernest and Julia

were—perhaps they thought we were preparing to amuse ouselves and them. What Kittie thought, I could not conjecture.

I exerted myself to the utmost, to make Mr. Hall feel at ease; and at length partially succeeded. He no longer moved his feet about uneasily; his hands assumed a comfortable position; his chair stood on four legs.

Presently I crossed the room to speak to Mary Shelton. As I was returning, Mrs. Talcott laid her hand on my arm.

"Edith," she said softly, "you are a good girl."

She had never called me "Edith" before. I knew that she thought I was exercising self-denial, in order to entertain a solitary, diffident man. Oh! how unworthy I felt. I ceased to observe Ernest and Julia, and engaged in conversation, tried to forget them.

Our companion was a quiet man, evidently unaccustomed to society; but he was a thinker: and although his thoughts were not clothed in the most beautiful language—though his sentences were brief, for the most part, and often badly arranged—his tastes unpoetical—his voice unmusical, he was a man in the true sense of the word:—a man self-educated, and self-dependent—a man with a mind; not the elegant thing styled 'gentleman,' because its tailor is a man of taste, or 'literary,' because it can quote fluently from Shakespeare and Byron, when its own stock of ideas runs low.

In the supper-room, I stood where I could easily observe Ernest. Involuntarily my eyes sought him, even while determining within myself to let him see how slightly I was affected by his apparent devotion to Julia.

But he did not see me. As they stood full in the light, conversing in low tones, I watched them.

Never before, had either seemed half so fascinating; and as I gazed, the words I had once heard him sing kept ringing in my ears—

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine."

Just before midnight, Ernest came to bid me good-by.

"I did n't mean to leave you so long, Edie," he said, carelessly; "but you will excuse me. I shall go to Maplewood with Mary in October—you may see me a dozen times before then." He took my hand—bowed, and was gone. Gone? I thought so till a half hour afterward I saw him standing in the back-parlor door in earnest conversation with Julia.

"Now, I know why you wished to be introduced to Mr. Hall," said Kittie, as we went up stairs together, after the guests were all gone. "It was because Julia was laughing at him, was n't it? And I did just as wrong, though he did n't know it. I was very sorry afterward: but how could I help laughing to see him tip back his chair, thinking all

the while what if he should topple over. He is a fine man after all, is n't he? but it 's a pity he is n't more accustomed to society!"

Mary had reached our room before me, and was nearly asleep when I entered: so I said nothing to disturb her, and lay very quietly after giving her a good-night kiss. When I knew, by her regular breathing, that she slept, I arose softly, and went to the window.

A gentle breeze had sprung up in the south, before which the leaves fluttered; above, the stars shone brightly. Without, all was calm, as if the world itself were tranquilly reposing on its axis, and all the hosts of heaven stood still: within, in my own heart, a tornado of passion swept away all peace—crushing hope—uplifting despair.

"Oh, I can not bear it—I can not bear it!" and as I spoke the words half aloud, I covered my face with my hands. "Then, that is the sort of woman, that has power to fascinate man! A beautiful face —a graceful form: what is mind in comparison with these! And Ernest—the peerless Ernest, has so far forgotten the dignity of his manhood, as to fall in love with a fine statue!"

Pride came to my aid. It said: "He will repent, and return again to you; do not receive him."

Then Love pleaded: "He is so noble—do not cast him off utterly."

But Pride gained the mastery: "Conquer this weakness!" it sternly commanded. "What if he

is intellectual, and beautiful, and fascinating? What if his every motion is grace—his every tone music? So long as another, by mere power of beauty, holds him a slave, he is beneath your contempt! A bright star suddenly fallen from its sphere, can no more bless your sight—let him alone!"

"Edith," said Mary sleepily, "where are you?"

I left the window, and covering myself with pride, as with a garment, lay down quietly and slept.

XXI.

——"Lean but upon a rush,
The cicatrice and capable impressure
Thy palm some moment keeps."

As You Like It.

"Friendships fragile and diurnal
I have wrought me in my time;
Out of sympathies most vernal,
Dreams that charm Life's childish journal,
Images of loves eternal
Broken in the play of Time."

Passion Flowers.

It was a clear, cool October evening, when Mary Shelton, Winnie, and I, stood on the piazza of Mr. Keene's house, looking down on the river, the clustered buildings, the church, and the graveyard, that lay below in the quiet moonlight.

Ernest was expected the next day, and then we were all going "walnuting," in a grove at a little distance from Mr. Keene's. Eddie's mother had promised to let him go with us; and in a state of perfect elation, he went from one to another, asking questions, and telling what he intended to do.

"Edie, Edie," he said, pulling my hand; "how many will there be? one, two, five, ten, seven, a hundred walnuts, and chestnuts, too, all scratchy —prick all Eddie's fingers! Mamma and papa go —and every body!"

The child had a sweet voice, and lisped so prettily, I always loved to hear him talk; so keeping him by my side, I suggested one thing after another, while he delightedly listened, making me repeat my words, over and over again.

"Mrs. Keene and Emily sat within by the window, talking on a subject of which they never tired —by-gone years. Now, I caught a glimpse of both faces, as they looked out for a moment on the piazza, then they were lost in the shadows of the room.

Now, Mr. Keene passed through the hall, looked into the parlor where his wife and Emily sat, tossed Eddie up to his shoulder, asked us if we were watching for any one who must be received out of doors, then went out at the gate; and we watched him as he descended the hill—now disappearing suddenly from sight—now clearly seen in the bright moonlight, till we could no longer distinguish his, from other moving forms in the distance.

"May we come in the parlor, Mrs. Keene?" said Winnie; "we shall all take cold out here."

"If you will promise to be very good girls, and not make me any trouble."

Accordingly, Winnie promised for us all, and entered.

"Now," began Winnie, before she was fairly seated, "I have just one little request to make. We all wish to hear some music; will you please play us all you know, Mrs. Keene?"

"What a moderate request! Is there nothing else I can do to oblige you, dear? Suppose, after I finish playing, I tell you all I know?"

"Oh, that will be delightful!" said Winnie; "please begin immediately."

"Then I must send you up to my room after my new music."

"Oh! can't you play without notes?" said Winnie. "It is so delightful to sit in the moonlight and listen to music!"

"If you are willing to hear my old pieces."

"Well, we 'll try and be satisfied with those, if you can't play the new ones without a light—then by and by, I suppose, you will grant our request to the letter."

"Who is speaking of letters?" said Mr. Keene, coming in at the door.

"I! I!" exclaimed Winnie. "Oh! is it for me?"

Mary looked wistfully at the little white envelop which he held up in sight a moment, then laid in his wife's hand.

"Oh dear!" sighed Winnie, disappointedly.

Mrs. Keene advanced with the letter to the window.

"Miss Winnifred Holmes," she slowly read, aloud.

In an instant Winnie was at her side.

"Now, I presume, you will not object to having a light in the room, romantic child!"

"Let me see it, please—oh, yes, I shall—it is

only from Julia Arnold, and I can wait very well till you are through playing."

"From whom could she be expecting one?" asked Mr. Keene; but as Winnie did not seem disposed to answer, he very prudently refrained from questioning her further.

"Please sing for us," said Mary, as Mrs. Keene seated herself at the piano.

"I never sing, Miss Shelton, but I know an old piece that is more beautiful than any song."

"Never?" asked Emily, in a tone of surprise; "you used to be always singing, Harrie!"

"That was years ago," she replied; and I fancied there was a tone of sadness in her voice—"it is so long since, I have forgotten all my songs."

The "old piece" of which she spoke sent tears to my eyes as she played. It was so touchingly sweet—so wave-like in its mournful singing—so triumphant in its closing strains of high-toned joy—that for weeks afterward, I dreamed of it night after night, fancying myself in the full fruition of more than earthly happiness.

"Oh, oh!" cried Winnie, suddenly. "Julia writes that Louise Hayward has married a rich widower with six children—a man old enough to be her father!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Keene, "you were willing to wait till I finished playing before you read your letter!"

"But," said Winnie, "I can hear you just as well, and I 'm almost through now."

"It will injure your eyes, dear."

"Oh! oh!! oh!!!" exclaimed Winnie. "Sarah Greyham has eloped with a Sophomore who was expelled from college last summer. Sober Grey! only think of it!"

"What else?" asked Mary.

"Nothing much, only she says several of her disappointed suitors have married persons far inferior to themselves; and, Mary, she says your brother is at their house, and would probably send his regards to Miss Brewster, if he knew she was writing to me."

How those last words, so innocently read, stung me!

Then the scornful Miss Arnold had heard of Ernest's previous attachment to her old enemy! How was I punished for flattering myself that her glorious beauty could not attract him from me!

"Do you think he will be here to-morrow?" Winnie asked, as she refolded the letter.

"No—or, at least, not before night."

"Then we must adjourn our nutting expedition," said Mrs. Keene. "We will say Thursday; and if he does n't come before then, you may send me word."

That night I resolved within myself what to do.

Ernest came on Thursday, just before noon.

"Were you disappointed at not seeing me sooner?" he asked. "I should have been here punctually, had I not been detained by business. Am I excusable?"

"Certainly."

At dinner, Mary told him of our proposed excursion to the grove.

"It will seem like old times, Edie," he said, "when you and Mary made wreaths for yourselves and me in the pic-nic grove—only De Witt will not be here to interrupt our pleasure."

I endeavored to answer in my usual manner.

Just after noon, we started for the parsonage. Ernest was delighted with the brook, the footbridge, and the narrow path winding up the little hill among the trees.

Still, he seemed unlike the Ernest of old.

Mr. Armstrong, Angus, Emily, and Winnie, were waiting for us, and we went on together to Mr. Keene's.

Eddie was in raptures, and begged to be allowed to go first with his father. In a few moments we reached the grove, crossed, on large stones, a tiny stream, whose bed was dry during the summer months, and came to a stand under a great walnut-tree.

After selecting the nicest nuts, one and another strayed away, till I was left with Ernest and Winnie.

I knew he often glanced toward me, and was constantly at my side; but Winnie was usually so unobserving that I had not once thought of her noticing it, till she laughingly exclaimed,

"Miss Arnold would certainly be jealous if she were here now!"

Ernest looked up quickly, and a sudden flush overspread his face. I saw that he was puzzled, because he did not attempt to reply. At length he asked, carelessly,

"Then you know Miss Arnold?"

"Oh, yes."

"Do you correspond with her?"

"Yes. I received a letter from her a day or two ago."

He grew suddenly pale, and half glanced toward me; but I did not appear to be listening.

Presently Winnie went after the rest of the party.

I was sitting at the foot of the tree, searching for the nuts hidden under the leaves. He came and sat beside me.

It is needless to repeat our conversation. I told him in plain words—not harsh ones—what I thought of him. All his efforts to change my opinion were unavailing. He called me "hard-hearted."

Little did he know the heart he had to deal with.

I heard the voices of our returning party, and rose up.

"I can see you this evening, Edith?"

"If you wish it," I answered, more coldly than I felt.

"Ernest," called Mary, "where are you?"

"Oh!" said Winnie, "there they are by that tree; what a quantity of nuts they must have by this time!"

"Why Shelton, what are you dreaming about?" asked Angus, laying his hand on Ernest's shoulder. "Where are your nuts, man? Come we are going to only one tree more!"

How I wished I was within my own room—the blinds closed—the curtains down—the door locked!

"Oh!" thought I, "if they knew my misery they could not speak to me!" But I roused myself, and with a counterfeited cheerfulness accompanied them.

Eddie prattled on gayly, now complaining of the burs that pricked him, now stopping to taste of a plump chestnut.

Was there ever sorrow like mine!

The sun was setting as we left the woods, and its last red rays shone on the crimson maple leaves till they glowed more fierily, while the yellow tree-tops caught the light as they quivered in the autumnal breeze.

We were all to take tea at the parsonage, toward which Winnie, light-hearted and happy, led the way. Ernest and Angus followed, then came Mr. Armstrong with Emily and Mary; while I chose to keep little Eddie beside me, walking after Mr. and Mrs. Keene. Before we left the village, his little feet grew weary.

"Please carry Eddie;" he said; and I took him in my arms, trying to amuse him with the little stories that pleased me years ago. But I could only remember portions of them: thoughts of the

coming evening mingled with the words, and my heart throbbed so I could scarcely speak.

"Why, Eddie!" exclaimed Mr. Keene looking back; "you are too heavy for Miss Edith to carry —come to me."

But his head was nestled lovingly on my shoulder, and I did not feel his weight.

"He does not tire me at all," I said; "when he does, I will put him down."

We had not proceeded far, when Angus left Ernest, and came back to me.

"I forgot to stop at the post-office," he said; "Shall I inquire for you?"

I told him I was not expecting letters, and he passed on. He soon overtook us, gave Winnie a letter, then came back and took Eddie from my arms.

"He is too heavy for you Edith;" he said.

I was tired, but had not known it till now; my head ached violently, and sharp pains darted through my arm and shoulder.

Winnie reached the house first, and ran up to her own room. The rest, after leaving their basketsful of nuts in the kitchen, went into the parlor, all but Ernest and Angus who remained on the piazza.

"Edith has one of her old head-aches I know;" said Emily looking pityingly toward me; "why do you never complain like other people?"

I tried to smile; but losing all self-control, burst into tears. Mr. Keene recommended vinegar and water, and Mrs. Keene produced a bottle of harts-

horn; but Mr. Armstrong said cold water was almost efficacious in removing his nervous headaches: so Emily took me up stairs to her room, where I remained a long time bathing my forehead and eyes, while she went back to prepare tea.

Presently Winnie opening the door asked softly if I were alone; then carefully closing it, came and sat down by me.

"Edie," she began, speaking hurriedly, "I want you to tell Emily and Angus something for me—will you?"

"What is it?" I asked.

"Do you know," she said, without answering me, "where this letter came from?"

"I presume I know who wrote it."

"Well, he is coming here next Monday; and—now don't look at me so, Edie—perhaps I shall go to Cincinnati with him Tuesday."

"Winnie!"

"Edith—don't!" and great tears rolled down her cheeks falling thickly on the open letter in her hand.

"But you will not go with him so soon?"

"I must—he wishes it; but don't tell Emily yet. I 'm sure I can 't go down to tea."

I could not see Emily alone long enough to deliver Winnie's message; but Angus accompanied us across the foot-bridge, and when he turned to go home, I told him.

He made no reply; and it was so dark I could not see the expression of his face.

Early the next morning, Ernest left. Mary had been intending to return with him; but Winnie sent over word that she must remain till after Tuesday.

I feared Mary would wonder at her brother's sudden departure; but his name was not mentioned till the next day. It was a stormy morning, and we sat together in my room, engaged in reading.

Reasoning with myself, I had grown calmer since he left: but a sudden thought of the past flashed over me, and dimmed my eyes with tears. I turned my head quickly that Mary might not see them: she rose and put her arms around my neck.

"Oh, Edie! I wish you were my sister—but you could not be happy with him."

She did not speak again; but her soft hand was on my forehead—my head was on her shoulder.

The wind rose, dashing the rain against the window-panes—whirling the brown leaves past—shrieking around the house like a despairing human voice.

"Then you know all?" I said, after a long silence.

"How could I help knowing it? Ernest is called handsome, and fascinating; and more than one—or two—or three have been fascinated by him. I knew he did not love them, but he loved you, Edith. You had some influence over him; and he is not easily influenced. He is fiery, with all his seeming calmness. I love him,

but I fear him, too. I could not tell any one else what I am telling you, but I can not bear to see you so changed."

"Am I changed very much, Mary?"

"Very much. Smile once Edith, and tell me you will try and not grieve over this any longer."

"I am trying all the while, Mary: but let me tell you all." I began at the first. I told her of our meeting on the balcony—of the note he slipped beneath my glove—of his letters—of every thing, even to our interview in the grove, and the last interview. When I had finished, I brought the letters, and the note.

"Would n't you destroy them, Mary?" As I spoke I tore the note in two. "No! I will keep them; and when I can read them over calmly, as I would a stranger's writing, I shall know that I have conquered myself." I put them in the ebony box with my mother's letter, and locked it.

"Now you begin to seem more like my Edith;" said Mary smiling; "let 's talk about the coming wedding. You will be lonely when Winnie is gone?"

"Oh, more lonely than I can tell! You must not go home next week—promise me you will not!"

"I can not promise now; but I will write to mother to-day, and if she can spare me—"

"Oh, I will write too!" I said; accordingly the letter was soon finished, and sent.

That evening we drew up the sofa before the

parlor fire, and sitting in the blazing wood-light, talked long about Ernest. The day before, I could not bear to hear his name mentioned; but I had already, in a measure, overcome that feeling. I was trying to conquer myself.

Then Mary spoke of Julia—not in connection with him—but now I could not but connect them in my mind.

After a while, Angus ran in to sit with us a few minutes, and the evening passed rapidly.

The Sabbath came:—a day of unrest to my soul.

Oh, this self-conquering! Through the long quiet hours succeeding our return from church, old memories came crowding over me, and going up to my attic chamber, I fastened myself in.

"What can I do?" I cried; "what can I do?" I tried to pray, though I knew not what to ask for: yet when I rose from my knees, the great dark world seemed brighter:—there was light somewhere. I had prayed for strength, and my heart was strengthened. The light that was dawning was the light of faith; but it was still very feeble —a breath might extinguish it.

Monday came: a busy, busy day. Winnie was going the next day, and there were so many things to be done.

Mary and I went over early in the morning. Emily received us with a quiet smile, rather sadder I thought than usual, and took us into the pantry to see her nice loaves of cake, frosted and

ornamented with thè utmost care. Winnie was up stairs, laying out articles to be packed for the morrow's journey; and Mary went to help her while I remained below. As the door closed after her, Emily looked up at me, then suddenly sinking into a chair, burst into tears.

"I can't help it, Edith;" she sobbed; "I have n't given way to my feelings till now. What shall I do when she is gone? Dear motherless child! who will watch over her? He is not like Mr. Armstrong or Angus—somehow I am afraid of him."

I forgot my own grief in trying to comfort her.

"I shall be here, Emmy—only just across the brook; and she will write to us very often."

"Edie—Edie;" called Winnie from the top of the stairs; "come right up here and see me! how can you neglect me so long!"

"Go;" said Emily, "and if you please, see what she is doing. She is so excited, she will have all Angus' and Mr. Armstrong's clothes packed up before we know it."

I laughed outright; and she smiled through her tears.

Just at dusk, Mr. Lee arrived; and while Angus, Mary, and Winnie entertained him in the parlor, Emily looked over the trunk, and laid out the traveling-dress, bonnet, collar, gloves, every thing; so that Winnie need not be away from her in the morning.

The morning broke, clear and cloudless. At

seven o'clock we were on our way to the parsonage. Just an hour more Winnie would be with us, and then—

Soon we were on our way to the church. Old men and women, the middle-aged, young girls, and children, flocked to see their old pastor's daughter married.

Even Aunt Nellie came, with her faded shawl, and a bit of white ribbon on her hood.

Lee looked very proud and handsome—Winnie flushed and beautiful. Emily trembled and I saw the tears come into her eyes, but she kept them back.

Angus was paler, and more dignified than usual: there was no change in Mr. Armstrong.

The few solemn words were spoken, the prayer said; and Winnie went down the aisle—no longer ours.

God bless you, child-like wife, through all the coming years that stretch on bright and beautiful before your vision!

Winnie had been gone a week; and the old parsonage was silent, as if death again brooded there.

Emily grew old in the quiet: even Angus seemed changed. Mary was to be with me only one day longer: could I, any more than Kittie, "be good" away from her?

Toward evening I saw Angus coming, and ran to the door to meet him.

"I don't want to see you," he said, laughingly; "where's Miss Shelton?"

"Oh, never mind! I'm jealous of that 'Miss Shelton.' She is n't to be seen till I have talked with you a little while."

"Intend to prejudice me, eh? Miss Shelton, please come into the hall a moment."

Mary who was sitting in the parlor, came quickly forward.

"Now, Edie," he began, coaxingly, "you go away a minute—that 's a little dear! and if you won't listen, maybe I 'll give you something one of these days!"

"Will you really?" I asked, still remaining near him.

"What will you give me?"

"Oh! any thing, almost."

"Grant all my requests?"

"Perhaps so."

"Then let me stay here."

"You great bother! what do I want of you? do you suppose I care any thing about you?"

"You called me 'little dear' a while ago."

"Well, that 's no proof of my affection—off with you!"

So after teasing him as long as I pleased, I ran into the parlor and closed the door. In two or three minutes, Mary entered, alone.

"Where 's Gus?" I asked quickly.

"Gone home: he said he would n't stay to come in."

"That 's too bad! but Mary—you look excited; what is the matter?"

"Will you try to soothe me if I tell you?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes: can't you trust me?"

"Are you very strong? Let me suppose a case —it is only a supposition. What if I should say —'Ernest is dead:' could you bear it?"

"I think so," I answered, doubtfully. "Tell me now!"

"Mary took a newspaper from her pocket, and laying it before me, placed her finger on a paragraph. I read:

"Married: at Philadelphia, on the 20th inst., Ernest L. Shelton, of ——, to Julia W. Arnold, of Philadelphia."

I read it over and over again, while Mary's eyes were fixed on me: I felt it, though she did not move her head.

"Are you sorry, Edie?"

"No: I am glad!" And from that moment I was free! I had conquered—with his aid. His union with Julia separated us forever; it was well.

XXII.

"Wherever strayed his aimless eye, there lay
The wreck of some fond hope, that touched his soul
With bitter thoughts, and told him all was passed."
POLLOK.

THROUGH the winter I was with Emily almost every day. Together we wrote to Winnie, together read her answers. She was very happy, only longing to see her dear home, and us all.

Angus commenced practicing his profession in the village, yet spending as much of his time as possible, at home. Once he was absent two days, with Mr. Armstrong. Emily said she believed they were going to ——, mentioning the village where Mary Shelton lived; and from that time I thought of Mary as the beloved of our pastor.

"What a minister's wife she would make!" I would sometimes say; "and then, Emmy, to think of her living so near us!"

But no one knew any thing about Mr. Armstrong's plans, unless it was Angus, and he would never betray his friend.

Six hours of the day I studied faithfully, and diligently; and with reading, music, and Emily, to occupy the remainder of the time, I put aside use-

less thinkings of the past, till I should have more leisure.

One pleasant day toward spring, I went to call on Aunt Nellie, who was glad at all times to see any one who did not appear afraid of her. She seemed to know, instinctively, that children feared her; and it was her delight to startle those who came creeping timidly past her door.

I found her spinning beside the fire, drawing out the thread finely; while the whir-r-r of the wheel sounding like the autumn wind, seemed in keeping with the loneliness of the place. The soft, white rolls lay beside her, each dwindling to a finely twisted thread beneath her fingers.

"You spin," she said, holding one toward me.

It was useless to decline Aunt Nellie's favors; so I took it, and commenced, as she showed me how. But it would not draw out smoothly, and only fell in pieces, while my teacher laughed, and told me to "begin again."

"I can't do it," I said, at length, leaving the wheel. "I 'd rather see you spin, Aunt Nellie."

"Can't do it: no—no," and she paced slowly backward and forward, with her hand on the wheel. "He could n't climb the North Pole. Who did climb it though? Somebody; I wonder if they ever got to the top. Here comes somebody that 'll know—you open the door, won't you, while I jist put on another cap?"

This last was spoken in a whisper, as she left a roll half spun, and disappeared into another room.

Aunt Nellie was always expecting some one; but I did not think she saw any person, till I caught a glimpse of a man entering the gate. Before I I could reach the door, his hand was on the latch, and we stood face to face. He was a man of about medium height, slender and well formed. His hair long and black, was streaked with gray; and from beneath his hat a pair of searching black eyes were fixed on me. Bowing, coldly, he seated himself in the nearest chair, while I closed the door. In a moment, Aunt Nellie made her appearance, crowned with the fantastically trimmed cap, in which her heart delighted.

The stranger bowed to her as she stood staring at him, but did not speak. A thought flashed across me. "Can it be her son?" He was evidently in no haste to commence conversation; and thinking my presence might be a restraint, I bade the old lady good afternoon, and started for home. The keen eyes followed me to the door, as if seeking to pierce me through.

I had not been in my room five minutes, when Jane ran up stairs.

"Miss Edith, there 's a man down stairs, that wishes to see the mistress."

"A man? what kind of a man?"

"Oh! I don't know—he 's rather queer-looking—he would n't tell me his name. He seems feeble, too."

I went down stairs, and met, as I feared I should, the stranger I had just seen at Aunt Nellie's.

His hat lay beside him, on the floor; and under-

neath the bronzed forehead, his black eyes burned fiercely.

"Hamilton Brewster!" and he stretched out both hands as if to keep me from approaching nearer—"Why do you come to me in that shape! My mother—let me see my mother!"

"She is not here," I said, trying to speak soothingly; "Uncle Ferdy, let me speak to you—I am your sister Edith's child."

"My mother! where is my mother!"

He demanded an answer. I gave it: "Will you come to her room?" I said, laying my hand on his as he sank back in the chair. He shrank beneath my touch—looked steadily at me a moment, then rose and followed me at a distance. Once in his mother's room, I persuaded him to lie down; then sent Jane to call Angus.

"Who is it?" he asked, immediately obeying the summons.

"I think—I am sure it is my mother's brother."

I then told him of our meeting at Aunt Nellie's, and of his demented appearance.

"It may be the beginning of a brain fever," said Angus; "but how shall I manage to see him?"

I thought of several plans, but none seemed feasible.

"Edith," said Angus, suddenly, looking toward me, "did you ever hear of my brother?"

"Yes."

"You must go with me, and tell him who I am, then I will inquire after Henry."

My uncle was asleep when we entered the room; but he tossed about restlessly, and a bright fever-spot burned on either cheek. We sat down till he should awake. Presently, he opened his eyes, and looked wildly around the room.

"Who is it?" he asked, fixing his eyes on Angus.

I told him, and he gazed earnestly at him.

"You know my brother, I believe," said Angus, gently. "Can you tell me where he is?"

"Dead:—he died ten—eleven years ago, they said: I was n't with him."

He allowed Angus to feel his pulse, and pass his hand over his forehead. As soon as I saw that he was not disturbed by his presence, I left the room. In about an hour, I heard Angus descending the stairs, and called him into the parlor.

"Your uncle is asleep," he said. "It will be best not to disturb him till I come again this evening."

"Have you any engagements before that time?" I asked. He had none, and was easily persuaded to stay to tea.

"I wish he would think of something else," said Angus, half talking to himself, as he stirred the embers on the hearth.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, it 's Harrie Clinton—Harrie Clinton, all the time, asleep or awake."

"Did he ever know her?" I asked, in surprise.

"Know her? I should think he ought to; he

was engaged to her when he disappeared from Maplewood. Then you never heard about that," he added, musingly.

"No: tell me."

"Well, it is said they were very much attached to each other; but when she heard of the crime he was guilty of, her love seemed turned to hatred;—she is a proud woman, you know, and high-spirited. Harriet was an orphan, with no near relative but an aunt living at the South. This aunt soon sent for her to come to her; and in a few weeks—not more than four or five—she married Mr. Keene; but I doubt whether she has had more than her share of happiness since. Keene 's a fine fellow. Queer world this, is n't it?" said Angus, suddenly starting up, and dropping the poker, that from long-continued contact with the coals, had become red-hot. "There! I 've scorched the rug:—but, Edith, what think you of this great world?—mean to pass through it softly, without any rubs or jars, eh?"

"If I can."

"That sounds as if you might have had trouble. Tell me about it; I 'm your only brother, you know—besides, I have something that I must tell somebody, and as you 're always finding out all about my affairs, I may as well tell you."

"As if you would tell any body else in the world!"

"Now, Edie, I 'm in remarkably good-humor

to-night; tell me about—Ernest, and I 'll tell you something that is perfectly delightful."

The blood rushed to my face—I was silent a moment.

"I have offended you, Edie—speak—say you will forgive me. I am very sorry."

The kindness of his tone touched me.

"I have nothing to tell, Angus, and you have not offended me:—you know all."

"Let me hear it from your own lips, my little adopted sister. I am not curious, but I want you to have a great deal of confidence in me."

And I told him all. He sat for a long time, quiet and thoughtful. Presently he took my hand, and smoothed it between his.

"Did you think I suspected this, Edie?" he asked, softly.

"Never, till to-night."

"Life is full of sorrows, but there are a great many pleasures in store for us:—we need not mourn over the past. I loved Emily Arnold as well as you loved Ernest, though in a different way. I reverenced her mind—you adored his beauty."

"But his mind, too, Angus."

"Very well, his mind too, if you please; but you were no more congenial than Emily and I:—she could never have made me happy, nor he you. But are you the worse for this! I tell you nay, my sister," he said, playfully. "All this discipline is but fitting us for higher enjoyment. What do

you suppose a girl of fifteen—or one a year or two older, say a person like Winnie—knows of love? She saw Lee, and was pleased with him. He was attracted by her; and, of course, it would break her heart if she could n't marry her first admirer. I tell you, Edith, I never liked that man!" and he brought his hand down on my chair-arm with a violence that made me start. "He has had a great deal of this world's experience—more, if I am any judge, than is good for a man. She has had none. And considering him her superior, just in the very points where he is beneath her, she will yield to him in every thing, till she becomes a mere cipher."

"Did you tell her this?"

"In substance—yes; but she would tell him, and then what? It 's too late to help it now, so we 'll not talk about it any more. Seven o'clock! I must attend to my patient immediately." So he went up stairs, while I sat thinking by the fire. I did not notice his entrance half an hour afterward, till he laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Our uncle appears to be better, Edith, but it will not last long. I think I had better send you a nurse from the village. When he gets well, I want you to break up this great establishment, and come and live with Emmy and me."

I shook my head. "I should like it very much, but I could n't, you know."

"Well, we don't want you, after all; you would be quite inconvenient in our kitchen. What can you do that is useful?"

"Watch over you, and so relieve Emily."

"And who would take care of you?"

"I."

"Oh! 'I' is a wonderful personage in its own eyes."

"And in yours," I suggested.

"You 're getting lively, Edith, and I don't want you to smile yet; let me tell you something doleful before you hear what has happened to me. Once upon a time—I wonder," said he, stopping short, "how it happens that you never heard Harrie Keene's name mentioned in connection with your uncle's; but as you never did, there are, of course, other things that you have n't heard of. 'There are more things in heaven and earth,' etc. Did Em ever tell you any thing about herself?"

"Never."

"Just like her! but I will."

"Would she like to have you?"

"She would n't object to my telling you. When she was only fifteen she was engaged to a theological student, who was intending, as soon as he graduated, to go on a mission. But after mother died, she felt that it was her duty to remain at home; and so she gave him up. Was n't that a brave heart, Edie? In two or three years he married and went to Armenia."

"But has she never heard from him?" I inquired, quickly.

"Yes, several times, indirectly; she knows that he is doing good abroad, while she does good very

quietly at home. And so she, faithful to her first love, has to my certain knowledge refused two offers—preferring to stay by me, you see, and keep me good. Have n't I kept well, under such influence?"

"Sometimes."

"Rather ambiguous: I suppose, though, you mean that I am better at some times than at others."

"On the contrary, I mean that you are worse at some times than at others."

"Still I am complimented."

"Without any intention on my part."

"Oh, Edith! you 'd be a pretty—that is to say, a passably good girl, if it were n't for one failing."

"Well?"

"You do flatter me so unaccountably—"

"I think it must be unaccountably."

"And you do so insinuate yourself into my good graces—"

"Well?"

"And you do so deferentially yield to my good judgment."

"Well?"

"And so forth. I 've forgotten the end, you 've interrupted me so many times. I was going to tell you something about myself."

"Always talking about yourself!"

"If I were n't, you would talk about me. Now can't you perceive that I am in a most delectable mood to-night—principally passive, and waiting to be drawn out on any subject."

"Name one."

"(Ahem!) How would you like to have—me—bring—Miss —— here—as—Mrs.—Dr. Holmes!"

"Very well, if you can first obtain her consent."

"I shall lose my equanimity presently—beware!"

"If you know any thing worth telling, do let me hear it now!"

"Oh, be patient, my dear friend: listen to a short preface. Do you see that ring on that finger."

"Yes."

"In Germany, when a gentleman is engaged, he announces it in that way."

"So if you were in Germany you would be engaged. Is that what you mean?"

"Precisely: and if I were not in Germany—"

"I don't believe it!"

"That's decided! but it is so, nevertheless."

"Tell me the lady's name; then perhaps I'll believe."

"Guess."

"Any one I know?"

"Yes."

"'Lady Macbeth?' whom you admired so—I can't find a word to express it, but you remember preferring her very far above the fair-haired "Ophelia."

"Guess again."

"Kit Russell?"

"No."

"Susie Aymar?"

"No-o."

"I can't think of any one else."

"You don't try."

"I 'll mention every name in school:" so I began:—

"Mary Raymond, Emily Sergeant, Carrie Holford, Mary Shelton, Sophie Hall, Sarah Hunt, Josie Dudley—"

"You 've mentioned the name," said Angus interrupting me: so I went through the list again, receiving a negative reply to each, till I came to Mary Shelton's which I had placed last. Angus smiled; it was a hearty smile too—very much resembling a laugh.

"Why do you reserve that name?"

"Because—shall I tell you? I thought she was engaged to Mr. Armstrong."

The smile became audible.

"Angus—Angus!" I had risen in my eagerness, and placed both hands on his shoulder. "Tell me truly—do you mean Mary?"

"Yes."

Impulsively I threw my arms around his neck, and kissed him—then suddenly retreated to my chair.

"I could n't help it, Gus, I 'm so happy!"

"Why should you help it my little sister?" he asked, still holding my hands and drawing me again toward him. "Now tell me I can make Mary happy, if she is too good for me."

"Oh, yes, I am sure you will try; and Gus, I 'm

equally sure that I will never scold you again for any thing!"

"Oh, that's being too good: if you grow so unnatural, I shall disown you."

"But will Mary come here to Maplewood?"

"To be sure; would you have me go there?"

"Oh, no! but I did n't think. It 's too good to be real."

"I 'm half inclined to think so myself."

"How soon, Gus?"

"Oh, I can't tell! you must ask Mary: not this spring, though."

Day after day I watched over my uncle, gazing into his face when he slept, and trying to fancy how he looked on that evening when he bade his mother "good-night" forever.

When I closed my eyes, I could see the tall, handsome youth, with fiery yet loving eyes, straight black hair brushed back from his broad forehead, delicately brown as if the rays of a West Indian sun, had left a shadow there: but when I looked at the restless figure before me, the dream vanished: I could not connect it with the reality. The long hair was no longer black; sin and suffering had left their mark on the broad forehead wrinkled and bronzed; and the firmly shut lips and deep lines about the mouth told of corroding care, and a short life grown long through sorrow; but whether it was a sorrow that would work to repentance, I could not tell.

An old man, he seemed to me as he lay there, his thin bony hands grasping the bed-clothes, and his dark face pressing the pillow, quiet for a moment, then tossing about in all the restlessness of delirious pain; yet he could scarcely be forty years old.

And then I thought of dear father Holmes, with his peaceful, holy face, from which it seemed to me, all traces of sin had been removed, leaving nothing but the light of Heaven in those eyes, and the sweet words of his Elder Brother on his lips that learned the language of the redeemed ere his eyes beheld the Redeemer—that sang the songs of the New Jerusalem, ere his feet walked its golden streets.

The fiery eyes were closed—not gently, but as with an effort—and when they opened, gazing into vacancy, I shrank back, fearing to meet them; for to him, as to my grandmother, I brought a remembrance of Hamilton Brewster. Often in his ravings, he threw his long, thin arms aloft, and cursed me in words that thrilled me through, while I vainly tried not to hear them. By night and by day they haunted me, till I grew pale, and thin, and nervous; and Angus said I was wearing my life out with watching, and must not enter the room. I could not tell him what it was, for my beloved father's name was mingled with those dreadful words; neither could I stay away from him; and now I studied how to soothe him when he raved so wildly. Sometimes I held his hands, or pressed

mine on his forehead, or smoothed back his long hair; and when he did not see me, he would gradually sink to sleep, and awake stronger, asking sometimes for Angus, sometimes for Mrs. Newell.

Once, as I was bending over him, he opened his eyes suddenly. I thought him asleep, and started back, shrinking from his gaze: but his expression was so unlike the usual fierce look of his waking moments, that I approached the bed, and sitting down beside him passed my hand over his forehead.

He smiled: then I could see the expression I fancied my grandmother's darling used to wear—and attempted to raise his hand. I bent my head to it, and he feebly smoothed my cheek. It was a caressing motion—I dared not break the spell.

"Harrie Clinton—oh will you send for her?" he asked, in a whisper.

He had not had a lucid moment in two days; and now I fancied he was much better.

"Certainly," I answered, in my joy, speaking aloud, as I started up. At the sound of my voice, he raised himself from his pillow with superhuman strength.

"Hamilton Brewster!"—the sound rang through the room, but his arms fell powerless, and he sank back heavily.

"Go quick for Dr. Holmes!" I said, calling to Jane from the stairs, "and ask Mrs. Newell to come to me."

While Jane was gone, he lay motionless; and

fearing lest he should again see me, I slipped quietly from the room.

When Angus came, I told him of my uncle's request, made, as I believed, in a lucid moment, and begged him to go at once for Mrs. Keene.

"It is of no use," he said, shaking his head; "I have asked her, and she refuses."

"But if she knew it was his request," I pleaded —"Angus, I will go myself!"

"Go," he said, and in three minutes, I was on my way.

Mrs. Keene listened calmly, with perfect self-composure, while I tearfully begged her to come with me. I expected a refusal; but to my great joy, she prepared to accompany me.

"It is too far for you to walk," she said; "wait a few moments, and the carriage will be ready."

The moments were hours to me. Not one inquiry did she make concerning him, nor did she manifest the least emotion. Eddie followed us to the door, and when he saw the horse, asked,

"Oh, mamma! please let Eddie go."

"Not this time, my son," she answered, calmly; and the little fellow suffered his nurse to lead him back.

As we went down the steps, he looked over his shoulder after us, and I saw two great tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Don't cry, darling," I whispered, going back to kiss him, "mamma is coming home soon."

His disappointment touched me; how could his

mother enter her carriage without noticing it! Thankful that my heart was neither ice nor stone, and angry with my silent companion, I remained silent also, as we rode down the hill, through the village street, across the bridge, and at length, up the avenue to the door.

Angus was alone in the room with my uncle as we entered. "She will not see him," I thought. "How can she know that there is more than one object in the room!" But I was mistaken. There was the same graceful inclination of the head, the same extended hand, the same manner with which she was wont to greet him and then she passed on to the bed.

Angus spoke gently to his patient. He slowly unclosed his eyes, which wandered a moment about the room, and then rested on the figure beside him.

His cheeks flushed, then grew very pale; there was a wild light in his eyes, he opened his pale lips, and stretched his hands toward her.

"Harrie—darling, darling," he murmured; and she bowed her head upon his pillow. "Say you forgive me!" he whispered, hoarsely.

Angus glided past me, and quickly following him, I went to my own room. Presently the door opened again, but I heard no footsteps, and then Angus came up the stairs. Restless, and excited, I went down to the parlor.

The carriage that brought Mrs. Keene, was gone —could she be gone, too? A sudden fear seized

me, and I turned to seek Angus, who met me in the hall.

"Your uncle is dead, Edie!"

Dead! And I thought he was getting better! I thought after a time he would be himself again; and then, perhaps, he would love me, and let me love him! I who so longed for the love of father, mother, brother, or sister. Brother of my sainted mother! and now he was dead!

Angus gently led me into the parlor, and sat down beside me. When his heart was touched, the tones of his voice were soft, and sweet as a woman's; and in soothing words he talked to me, till the room grew dark, and it all seemed like a dream.

He told me how stern Mrs. Keene had forgiven him for all the suffering he had caused her through the long years of his self-exile: how her tears fell thickly on his face, when he called her "darling," and begged her to love him once more: and how he died with her hands clasped in his.

"She will be a changed woman from this day," said Angus; and it was as he prophesied.

The fear was gone, the mystery solved, the great weight taken from her heart. And if her old friends looked in vain for the mirthfulness and exuberance of spirits that once characterized Harrie Clinton, they found in its stead, a chastened and abiding love manifested toward all, making glad the heart of her husband that had so long yearned for the withheld treasures of her affection.

XXIII.

"Summer and winter found us together,
Through snow, and storm, and shiny weather;
Together we hid in the scented hay,
Or plucked the blooms of our English May—
Willy and I."

Two years passed swiftly—peacefully—with no great sorrows, and many joys. During the first year, Angus brought to Maplewood his bride—dear Mary Shelton; and with her near me, with Emily still at the parsonage, and Mrs. Keene on the hill, I found much to think of—much to keep me busy.

Twice had I met Ernest at Mary's, and conversed with him with a degree of self-composure that surprised me even; and, that trial of a first meeting over, I set my heart at rest. He no longer seemed to me the Ernest of my dreams. He had grown old prematurely. No longer erect in form, he seemed less noble in feature than of old; and I ceased to regard him as one who had been all the world to me. The dream had faded; it was very beautiful, making the night-time appear as the day, but it vanished; and there were long, dark hours, as ever, the longest and darkest before the dawn-

ing. But now the sun was up in the heavens, and my heart forgot its dreams in the present, or remembered them only as something vague, and vapory, and uncertain.

It was said that Ernest was unhappy: that his beautiful wife, tired of his society, left him, to mingle in the gay circles where she had been in former years idolized for her beauty; and that he, drinking deeply to forget his sorrows, stood on the verge of ruin.

Mary did not tell me this; but I heard from many sources that which was written on her anxious face.

Mrs. Keene and I were warm friends. From her I learned much of my mother—in substance, what I had heard before; but every girlish act or word possessed a deep interest for me.

At the end of the second year, Winnie came home, bringing with her the wonderful baby we had heard so much about—Adrian the Second—her precious, dark-eyed, curly-haired Addy.

How like old times it seemed, when Winnie sat down beside the blazing sitting-room fire at home, with Mr. Armstrong in the great chair in the corner, and Mr. and Mrs. Keene, Angus, Mary, and I clustering around her. Then baby went from hand to hand, and every one commented on his beauty, praising his bright eyes, and kissing his sweet lips. And while Winnie talked of her home, and her new friends, Mr. Armstrong presented strong attractions, in the shape of a watch and pencil, to

the little fellow, enticing him at length to his arms, where he nestled, twining his fat hands with impunity in the minister's long, dark hair, patting his cheeks, pulling at his white neckerchief, and laughing loudly at the mysterious sentences softly addressed to his babyship.

Winnie was the same, and yet not the same.

When excited, she was gay and happy as of old; but when alone with Emily or me, a shade of sadness almost imperceptibly stole over her, and it was with apparent effort that she conversed. Emily noticed it, and watched her anxiously, trying to ascertain whether she enjoyed her new home as well as the old.

One evening—it was the third week after Winnie's return—we were all invited to Mrs. Keene's: —Mr. Armstrong, Emily, Angus, Mary, Winnie, baby, and I, comprised the "all." Mr. Keene, whose business was in New York, and who spent three days of the week there, was expected home that evening, with an acquaintance from the city.

There seemed to be some mystery about it, and I was among the uninitiated.

All the afternoon, Eddie played with Addy: "pretty baby," he called him; and Addy was delighted with Eddie's attentions. Very patiently did Eddie try to make him call kittie, who lay asleep before the fire; but Addy preferred smoothing her fur the wrong way to learning her name, and Eddie was in trouble lest his dear kittie should be injured.

But the principal mystery was, why baby could not walk. His little play-fellow could not understand it at all—having had very little previous acquaintance with babies.

"Addy has got feet, mamma," he would say, "'cause I did see 'em! Why don't he walk, mamma? I don't believe his mamma tells him he must!" he added, in a whisper.

Mrs. Keene explained to her wondering child the cause of baby's delinquency, and for a time he was satisfied. We were busily engaged in convertion, when he again came to his mother's side, and touched her arm.

"Mamma, may Alice take baby to the nursery, and let him see all my playthings?"

"If his mother is willing."

"Then please ask her, mamma."

"Why can't you, dear?"

"Because, mamma, I ain't sure she is his mamma—she's Winnie, you know."

So Mrs. Keene asked the wished-for permission, which mamma Winnie instantly granted; and the little happy noisy ones were consigned to Alice's care. In a few minutes, back came Eddie, his eyes sparkling, and his cheeks dimpled with smiles.

"Mamma," he began, in a whisper, yet loud enough for us all to hear, "if baby Addy had on panties, then I guess he would walk. Please may n't Alice put my new panties on him?"

"They would be a great deal too large, dear; and I 'm very sure he would n't walk any better.

One of these days his mamma will make him a nice little pair; but he is n't old enough now."

Tea was delayed for Mr. Keene, and his wife watched for him from the parlor window till, in the shadowy twilight, she could no longer discern moving objects. Just as the lamps were lighted, I heard voices at the gate, and Mrs. Keene went into the hall to meet the gentlemen, closing the door after her.

Wondering what it all meant, I turned toward Winnie, who just then bent smilingly over her baby.

Emily was industriously turning over for the half dozenth time, some fine engravings on the table, and Mary was absorbed in her work; so, as the conversation in the hall seemed drawing to a crisis, I could only sit and await the opening of the door.

Mr. Keene entered first, and bowing pleasantly to us all, presented the new comer.

"My friend, ladies."

It was a novel form of introduction; and I looked first at Mr. Keene in some surprise, then glanced toward his friend thus laconically introduced.

The stranger's eyes rested for a moment on Mary, then turned to Winnie. I had seen that face before; where—oh, where? Puzzling thoughts rushed tumultuously through my brain, and the warm blood flushed my cheek in that one brief moment, while I tried so hard to remember, and could not!

His glance met mine, and I half rose—trembling, glad—fearing it might be but a nameless shadow—hoping it would claim the name by which I called it—Willie Page! Could it—oh, could it be my little playmate Willie?—the bright-eyed, pleasant boy of my recollection, so soon grown to manhood?—the Willie over whose departure to school I had shed so many bitter tears?—the Willie often thought of, never heard from?—the Willie dead to me, alive again?—the Willie lost, now found?

We sat down together, regardless of the presence of others. My memory was beyond the seas. It passed up the broad lawn, entered the echoing halls of a long-silent home, peopled the vacant rooms with dear forms of the unforgotten dead, and fair faces of the beloved living. Hand in hand it went with Willie up through the past years, till it stood at the threshold of childhood, gazing, as with prophetic vision, into the future—that future was the present.

The sudden opening of a door aroused me. Mr. Armstrong and Angus had come; and while I introduced them to my newly-found friend, Mrs. Keene led the way out to tea.

Mr. Keene was in a merry mood, keeping Mr. Armstrong and Mary, who sat near him, in a state far removed from their usual sedateness.

"Please tell us where you found Mr. Page," said Angus, when Mr. Keene, for a moment, paused. "Edith is hearing the whole of it first."

"Certainly," was the gracious reply of our ever

gracious host. "About a week ago, I saw a young man with an exceedingly woe-begone face, pass and repass my office. I knew at once that he was in trouble of some sort; and not knowing how great it might be—being a man of a benevolent turn of mind—I felt anxious to know something about him, and to relieve him, if possible. When I came home, I thought of that face. In the night-time, that face was ever present—its owner, the intangible hero of my dreams. In the morning, I awoke to think of that face. On my way to New York, a vision of Wall street rose before my mental optics, and in its midst that face. Sitting in my office, *that face* passed my window."

"I should have followed it," said Winnie.

"So should I," said Mrs. Keene.

"Perhaps you would n't, if it had been in quest of you."

"Was it?" asked two or three voices at once.

Mr. Keene smiled. "You will see. In less than five minutes, my door opened. I looked up, and saw—that face. Its expression was nothing like that," he added, glancing toward Willie. "The young man was in trouble, as I said before; but I asked no questions, and after a time he began. He had heard that I lived in Maplewood; and he had a friend either in that or an adjoining village. I assured him I would give him all the information I could; and being thus encouraged, he proceeded to inquire if I knew an elderly lady—a Mrs. Wesson. Now I knew by the expression of his face

that he did n't care a fig about Mrs. Wesson, so I thought there was no harm in telling him 'no.' I wish I had sent for young Douglass to make a crayon sketch of the face as I then beheld it; because I am morally certain I shall never see it again, unless—well, to return to my story. Mrs. Keene, will you close the register? our friend Edith appears to be uncomfortably warm. The young man's appearance was like that of a person who has received a blow; and, as if fearful of receiving another, he rose to leave my office. He was rather a pleasant young man, and, to tell the truth, I felt sorry for him; so, just as he was closing the door, I called him back, and told him, that although I could give him very little information relative to the deceased lady, having had no personal acquaintance with her, I should be happy to introduce him to a grand-daughter of hers, if he would take the trouble to come here with me to-night. He may be an heir, for any thing I know, come to turn Edith out of house and home:—I intend to keep an eye on him. But I would answer all his questions, Edith—that is, if they are civil ones."

Five short weeks did Willie Page remain at Maplewood. Then he went away, promising to return in the spring; and I was very happy. It was only for a few weeks—then I should see him again; and in the full fruition of hope, I studied harder

than ever, in order to accomplish a great deal before his return.

Meantime, Mary received intelligence of her mother's death, and went home to spend a week.

Winnie grew quiet and sad; for she heard but seldom from her husband, and care and anxiety took the place of her former light-hearted thoughtlessness. He was absent from Cincinnati on business; and Winnie waited patiently to hear from him, and to know when she should return. The winter wore away, and for two long months she received no tidings of the absent one.

Emily mourned in secret over Winnie's changed manner, and when she could no longer endure the sight of her thin, pale face, came over to talk with me.

"What shall I do, Edith!" she exclaimed on one such occasion. "This is harder to bear than the parting from her at first. She is no longer our Winnie. She seems to think of nothing but him —to care for nothing but his love. The Bible she used to read so often has not been unclasped once since she came home! It is his influence that has changed her so. Poor father! Must all his prayers be of no avail?"

Then I would think, "How can I be so selfish as to be happy while there is so much sorrow around me!" and leaving my plans for the day unaccomplished, I would go home with Emily, trying to cheer her, and to bring back the smiles to Winnie's face. I tried vainly, yet perseveringly,

to lift her thoughts from the present—to picture a bright future, peaceful and cloudless.

But, she answered always, "There is no future for me, Edie—present sorrow is killing me. He may be dead! do you think I can live without him?" Dear, trusting heart! Believe that nothing but death can separate you: believe that you are thus separated, and be happy! For there is a separation worse—far worse than death!

Spring came with April violets, and bursting buds; and the grim old trees awoke to a new life, and a new beauty. He was coming! and I exulted with the birds, like them singing glad songs, while my heart was a fount of melody, ever increasing as it flowed forth full and free. But, alas for Winnie! For her there was no beauty, no joy, no peace even, while absent from him.

When was ever earthly dream realized? Willie came: but he had grown so pale, and the cough that commenced in the winter had so increased, that I dared no longer be happy. For many days I could not tell him my fears; but when he himself spoke of it, and reassured me with hopeful words, I took courage. His physician had recommended a voyage to the south of Italy.

"I will only be gone a little while," he said, "and then —"

The warm, bright days of later spring came, and together we visited at the parsonage, or went to see

Mary, and Mrs. Keene. But, best of all, we loved to cross the foot-bridge, and wandering down beside the brook, where the blue skies and leafy trees were mirrored, talk of the future hopefully, trustingly; of the few months that would pass quickly, and then—

"Then, my Edith," he would say, with my hand in his, "we will go back to that dear old English home, and never be separated, not even for a day."

It was there I told him of past years, and showed him all the letters so long locked within the ebony box. I could read them without emotion, now—"as I would read a stranger's writing;" and when he had seen them all, I tore them in pieces, and scattered them on the water, watching them as they floated down on the ripples. Then I read him my mother's letter; and he sighed as I refolded it.

"You are not a Christian, Willie?" I asked falteringly.

"No, Edith; I have tried to be a great many times, but I have no one to help me. Show me the way, Edith."

"I, Willie? I don't know the way myself; I wish I did."

"Will you read the Bible with me every morning and night, Edith? then when I am gone, it will be a sort of connecting link between us, will it not?"

One brief week more! Then I went with him to the city—went with him to the vessel; and on

its deck bade him good-by. I would not distress him with my fears; and as the boat touched the shore, I turned to look at him once more, and smiled through thick gathering tears. As if the form standing so far off, and waving its farewell, could know whether I smiled or cried!

XXIV.

"The path by which we twain did go,
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
Through four sweet years arose and fell,
From flower to flower, from snow to snow.

"And we with singing cheered the way,
And, crowned with all the season lent,
From April on to April went,
And glad at heart from May to May:

"But where the path we walked, began
To slant the fifth autumnal slope,
As we descended, following Hope,
There sat the Shadow, feared of man."

TENNYSON.

It was sunset on a warm June day, two weeks after Willie's departure, when Angus, Mary, and I, sat with Emily and Winnie, on the piazza steps of the parsonage.

Baby Addy had learned to say many little words; but his soft voice, so sweet and musical, failed to arrest the attention of his mother, who, with folded hands, sat looking off in the distance, like one who imprisoned watches and waits—not quite despairing—for one to come and release her; yet fears to hope, where hope has so long been vain.

Angus had just returned from the post-office, and absorbed in his paper, ceased to listen to our conversation. Emily took Addy into the garden after flowers, and Mary and I watched the sunset-clouds,

so azure, and golden, and fleecy, as a light wind wafted them toward the north, breaking their outlines, changing their delicate shapes, spreading them in long lines of beauty, or gathering them into mountains and high towers, seas and valleys, cities, and level plains.

As we gazed silently, Angus suddenly started up, and entering the open door, beckoned us to follow him. Winnie still sat with her cheek pensively resting on her hand, apparently undisturbed by our rising.

"Mary—Edith," said our conductor, pausing at length near the kitchen door, and his voice was hoarse and broken—"From my inmost heart I curse Adrian Lee! May God forgive me!"

He sank into a chair, and bowing his head on his clinched hands, sat motionless. Mary, in her calm, low voice, was first to break the silence. Gently raising his head, and smoothing back his hair, she said,

"Tell us all, Angus—what has he done?"

"Broken Winnie's heart! is not that enough? Read it—I can not tell you."

Mary took the paper from his hand, glanced hastily over and gave it to me. In the dim light I read aloud:

"One, Henry Mercer, calling himself Adrian Lee, was on Monday last, arrested at Savannah, on charge of bigamy. The prisoner is an old offender, but we trust this time he will not be allowed to escape justice."

"You will not tell her this to-night?" said Mary, as I paused.

"No—wait. Emily must not know it yet. Go back to Winnie—she may wonder why we left her so suddenly. My wretched sister!"

He groaned aloud as we turned to leave him, and covered his face with his hands. As I passed the door, there was a rustling amid the shrubbery, and supposing Emily to be near, I went quickly through the sitting-room to the piazza. Winnie was not there. Down the steps we went, and passed into the garden, where at the gate Emily stood, holding Addy in her arms.

"Mamma—mamma—" he called, and stretched his hands toward me as I came near.

"Mamma is n't here;" said Mary, "come to aunty."

But he clung to Emily, laughing, and hiding his face on her shoulder.

"It is too damp for him," said Emily, "I am going in now."

I detained Mary, while she passed through the gate. A terrible fear came over me, and I shivered in every limb.

"Stay here till I come back," I said; then swift as thought I entered the house by the back door, going straight to Winnie's room. She was not there. Emily and Angus sat together on the piazza: through the open window I heard their voices. Gliding softly down the stairs, I took a lantern hanging behind the door, and placing

matches within it, rejoined Mary in the garden. She looked up in surprise.

"Are you crazy, Edith?"

"Almost: hear me! When I read those dreadful words aloud, there was a rustling beneath the window. Emily was here with Addy—we had left Winnie alone. I went quickly to the piazza—she was not there. When I left you a moment since, it was to go to her room. She is not in the house. Mary, will you come with me?"

"Alone?"

"Yes. If she is safe, we need not disturb Emily and Angus."

With quick, quiet steps we hurried down the path, stopping in the shadow of the trees to light the lantern.

"It is moonlight," said Mary.

"Yes; but it is very dark among these trees."

I dared not speak my fears—dared not acknowledge them to myself. An indefinable impulse hurried me on—on toward the foot-bridge. There we paused, the red light of the lantern flickering on the water, where the pure, pale moonbeams glimmered. Above us, the leaves fluttered softly—below, gushing waves of melody swept by. Where was Winnie!

Pushing back the low limbs of the trees, I went on, where Willie and I had so often walked and talked together, following the course of the brook. Well might Mary ask, "Are you crazy?" I believed I was.

With one hand grasping the lantern, the other pressed hard against my heart to still its beatings, I bent forward.

There was no sound: even the leaves stopped fluttering, and only the brook sang on.

Mary took the lantern from my hand, throwing the light among the trees. I listened, still bending over the water.

"Oh, my God, be merciful—strengthen me!"

The prayer came from an agonized heart. Down, far down where the water ran shallowly, and trees drooped their branches to the white pebbles, I saw—

Weak heart, take courage! The shadows are thick here, and trees assume strange shapes.

But that shadow!

With fleet steps I trod the sandy strip of shore.

I reached the spot. There was a white dress clinging to a low limb, rising and falling with the motion of the waves.

That shadow!

I came nearer—I uncaught the dress—I waded out into the water. With my own hands I drew that shadow to the shore.

There is a shade that comes creeping downward over the faces of strong men, when soft hands hold the dying head, and smoothe the pillow; and that same shade steals over little children, who, "folding their pale hands so meekly," trustingly yield up their souls to God. And we shed bitter tears over the dead forms, and think it is so hard to say,

"Thy will be done;" but where in all earth's vocabularies can we find words to express an agony like this!

I sat down, supporting her head on my lap. The long, dark hair, loosened by the motion of the waves, fell over her white face. I lifted the thin hands, folding them "humbly, as if praying dumbly, over her breast."

How long I bent over her, I can not tell. I only know that heaven seemed opened, and the angels of God hushed their golden harps as they bent weeping above us.

The glassy eyes, so mournful even in death, looked upward, and I looked down to them.

Presently footsteps came near—strong hands lifted the dead form from my lap, and Mr. Armstrong gently raised me up.

"Miss Emily has fainted," he whispered, "and Mrs. Holmes is alone with her."

"Do not go with me," I said, as he led me along the shore, "stay with Angus."

For a moment I stood, endeavoring to gain strength, then went on to the foot-bridge. With unsteady steps I crossed it. The house was in sight: approaching nearer, I caught a glimpse of Jane standing in the door.

"Send Mrs. Newell and Russell to me," I called, loudly, then stood leaning against the fence till they should come. The gardener, a man of strong nerve and giant frame, came first. I sent him to Angus.

Mrs. Newell trembled with alarm as she ran hastily from the house. The story was soon told; and, speedily as possible, we went to the parsonage.

Emily had been removed to the parlor.

"They will come in by the back door," said Mary, "so I brought her here."

With her usual thoughtfulness for others, she had lifted Emily in her arms, and brought her to this room, that she might not see the corpse when it was brought home.

"You ought to go and lie down a little while," said Mrs. Newell, looking pityingly at the pale face and wild eyes that bent over Emily.

Mary shook her head. I knew that she was faint; and drawing her from the room, went with her up stairs, where she would be for a time removed from the excitement. Passively she obeyed me, as if she dared not resist, laying her head wearily on the pillow, while the long-suppressed tears streamed over her cheeks.

As I closed the door, a wailing sound reached my ears—"Mamma, mamma!" I entered Winnie's room, and taking the dear baby in my arms, soothed him with caresses, and laid him down beside Mary.

At midnight I stood alone in the study—alone with the dead. Oh, Winnie, no longer ours!

Once another form lay in the place of this—the

form of an old man, not weary of earth, but longing for Heaven. This was a slighter form, "fashioned so slenderly, young, and so fair!" The glassy eyes were closed now, and the long lashes lay on a marble cheek.

The long, dark hair, was brushed smoothly on the white brow: I could not bear to see her in a shroud, so I brought one of her own white dresses, and turning the head on one side that it might not seem so deathly, laid flowers on the pillow. My work was done.

"Winnie! oh, Winnie!" The cry rose to my lips. With pain I forced it back, and kissing the white hands meekly folded over pale flowers, passed out of the room.

The funeral day came. One by one the carriages stopped at the church door: the coffin was borne up the aisle.

Not quite three years ago she stood there—just where they placed that coffin—light-hearted, and oh, so beautiful! and bitter tears gathered in my eyes at the thought of parting with her, my first friend in a strange land.

But now! Saviour of sinners, plead for her! she has passed beyond our prayers.

And ye great army of the Redeemed, who with sins all forgiven, bow before the throne—plead with God for the sake of Christ His Son.

Sainted spirit of the holy man who went to Heaven with a prayer for her on his lips—tell Him how Jesus died for her! Pray God be merciful!

One by one, sad faces gazed upon the dead. Heavy and deep were the sobs that broke the silence. Old men looked, and trembled; and little children shrank back in fear.

"Ashes to ashes—dust to dust."

Earth covered the coffin; and we left her there, to her still, unbroken slumber. Left her till the archangel's trump shall sound: till the heavens shall be gathered together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

What, oh what are we all, without the grace of God! "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such, the second death hath no power."

"Mamma—mamma!" The cry came to my ears as I entered the lonely old house. That sound thrilled me; and for the first time in many days, hot tears gathered in my eyes. I took the motherless babe to my heart; he sobbed himself to sleep in my arms.

For three weeks a slow fever burned in Emily's veins, and through two long nights we thought we watched beside a death-bed. But God spared her: and purified through much affliction, she walked in His sight, more blameless than ever. Trusting with an abiding confidence in Jesus, I could see on her calm brow, and in her mild eyes, the peace that shone through all her father's features, and marked his walk with God.

XXV.

JULY—August—September. Garden blossoms faded, and leaves grew bright, then sere; and from the ashes of dead flowers, sad thoughts sprang up, and mournful remembrances took deeper root, fanned by the wailing breath of autumn.

Across the seas reigned eternal summer, and its soft breezes brought strength and vigor to Willie's frame. But he was not coming! The northern winds would kill him now, his physician said; and he must be content to wait till spring.

"It is very hard, Edith,"—these were the words he wrote in every letter—"but," he added, playfully, "I'll never be sick again: it is n't at all pleasant."

"Why do you always call him 'Willie?'" asked Mrs. Keene one day, when in reply to a question I mentioned his name. "It is a sweet name, but hardly dignified enough for our sedate Edith's lips —is it Eddie?"

"I don't know," said the little fellow, who in his attempts to teach kitty her letters, only heard the three last words.

"Hear kitty say 'A,' mamma!"

"But, my son, you must n't hurt her."

"Oh, no, mamma; I just pinch her ear softly—so—and she says it just as pretty. Poor thing!" and he passed his hand caressingly over her white fur, "now say 'B.'"

"I was trying to think," said I, "of a good reason, but I have only one to give. Till I was ten years old, I thought it was his whole name, and can not entirely divest myself of that idea now. I never called him any thing else, neither did his parents, nor my father, nor the servants. 'William' would convey to me an idea of a very different person."

Then we spoke of the evening when Mr. Keene brought him with him from New York; and wondered how they should meet so soon, and so soon become such excellent friends.

Two days afterward, Mary and I went to spend the evening with Emily. Mr. Armstrong was, as usual in his study; but when he heard our voices, he came down and sat with us a full half hour. After he left us, I went to the window; and looking out on the trees, my mind went wandering back to the time when Winnie sat on the piazza wearily awaiting *his* coming.

As I looked I saw the figure of a man walking down the path; yet in the uncertain light, I could not see it clearly.

"Angus is coming already;" I said; and Emily and Mary, who were talking together, rose and stood by the window.

"No, it is not he—it is too short;" said Emily.

"And not nearly so erect," said Mary. "I never saw him before."

"Nor I."

He came around to the side door, and knocked.

"For Miss Holmes:" I heard him say, as Emily opened the door; "I am to wait for an answer."

He sat down; while she lighted a lamp, and glancing hastily at the direction of the note, left the room.

As she returned in a few minutes with the answer, I saw that her cheeks were flushed.

After the door closed, there was unbroken silence in the room for a full minute.

"We can't allow such proceedings," said Mary at length, playfully, "without knowing what it all means."

Emily hesitated. "I am so—" she began.

"Don't tell us!" interrupted Mary, putting her hand quickly over her mouth, "I did n't intend to inquire."

"But I must—I wish to;" and Emily removed the hand retaining it in hers.

She repeated briefly the story of her former life. It was not new to me; but she did not know it: Mary had never heard it before.

"And now," said she, "he is at the village, and has asked permission to call on me this evening."

"This evening?" we both asked.

"Yes."

I exchanged glances with Mary. "What is his name, Emmy?"

"Lockwood."

"And we shall have to learn to call you by a new name, eh?"

"Edith!"

She looked half reproachfully at me. I was sorry for what I said, and told her so. She was very much agitated.

Perhaps she was thinking how he must have changed during those long years; or it might be she was wondering whether he would know her. Her cheeks flushed, then grew pale, and her voice was unsteady.

He was married! Why had I not thought of that before? One moment I was selfishly glad—the next, unfeignedly sorry. While I was thinking, there came a second rap; this time it was at the front door.

As Emily rose to open it, Mary and I slipped quietly from the room, and hastily taking our bonnets and shawls, ran down the path.

"Come with me," I said, "Angus will know where to find you."

But Mary objected. "No: he had better not go there to-night. Come home with me, and we can tell him about it first."

But Angus had heard the news already. Mr. Lockwood was a widower and had just returned from Armenia with three little children. First, he went to his old friends, in his native town, sixteen miles distant.

The church was without a pastor, so they imme-

diately gave him a call. This he had not yet accepted; but as his health was feeble, it was doubtful whether he would ever return to his station in the East. Then leaving his children with a maiden sister, he came directly to Maplewood.

"Don't you wonder what for?" asked Angus suddenly.

Before we could answer, a messenger came for the doctor.

"Somebody's baby is sick—of course: wait till I come back, Edith," and in a moment he was gone.

For more than an hour Mary and I sat talking by the fire. The room simply but tastefully furnished, was small, and very pleasant. It always wore such a home-like aspect, so neat, so cheerful, that I liked it far better than my own home.

"If all your friends lived with you," said Mary, when I praised her pleasant house, "you would n't find the rooms too large. Books are good companions, but very quiet ones; and they alone can not always make a home."

I had found it so, long ago.

When Angus returned, he brought a letter for Mary.

"It is father's handwriting," she said, breaking the seal.

"Sit down a moment, Edie, it is n't late yet, and perhaps there will be some word for you. 'Ernest and Julia are at home; that is the first news, and —what? 'Ernest is going to California next month.' Oh, dear!"

Mary sighed aloud.

"Perhaps it is the best thing he can do;" said Angus.

"How can Julia consent!" said Mary. "And such society as he will be thrown into, too!"

"What if I should go, Mamie?"

"I would go with you."

"Next week?"

"Yes."

"Don't make your arrangements till she has finished her letter." He listened to me, and was quiet.

"That is all the news I believe. Father sends love to Edith and all my friends. Must you go now?"

"Yes—it is nearly ten o'clock. Good-night."

"How did you find out so much about Mr. Lockwood?" I asked as Angus went home with me.

"He stopped at Mr. Keene's: it seems they were class-mates in college."

"Why did you never know that before?"

"I presume Mr. Lockwood, in his college days, did not see fit to tell his friend of his engagement; and though they have corresponded till within four or five years, Emily's name was of course never mentioned."

"But he must have known that Mr. Keene lived in the same place with her."

"No; he has only been here about four years, and during that time they have not heard from each other."

The next morning Mr. Lockwood left the village, to return in the course of a week; and then, for the second time, Emily was engaged. I cried when she told me—how could I help it!

"The dear old parsonage will pass into the hands of strangers, never again to be my second home!"

"But perhaps not till you are hundreds of miles away from it," said Emily.

"Then you will not go this winter?"

"Oh, no."

"And I will try and not think of it till the time comes."

"Perhaps I shall not go at all," she said, very calmly.

"Why, Emmy! how can you speak so!"

"Because, Edith, I have had too many disappointments to trust with confidence in the future. Death often comes to break up all our plans;" and tears gathered in her eyes as she spoke. "Not that I would waste life in grieving over anticipated sorrows; but it is not best to look forward to a state of exemption from trouble—a degree of happiness never attained in this world, dear."

"I have heard it said that those who suffer most enjoy most: certainly, Emmy, if that is true, you must lead a blessed life hereafter! I wish I could be as cheerful as you always are: what makes you so, Emmy?"

"The belief that Jesus has accepted me with all

my unworthiness, and written my name in His Book of Life."

"Oh, if I could only feel so, Emmy!"

"Tell your Saviour that, Edith—tell Him you would be His, and He will teach you the way to heaven."

One cold, still day in mid-winter, after a long snow-storm had made white islands of the great stones in the brook, and covered the earth evenly, Angus drove up to the door, as was his habit when he came that way to visit a patient.

"I want you to come and spend the day with Mary," he said. "I can't wait but a minute."

"Why, Angus, it is so cold! did you come on purpose for me?"

"Yes."

"Is any one else invited?"

"No:—any more questions to ask? Run and get your bonnet, quick!"

There was no denying him, so I obeyed; and in five minutes the bells jingled down the avenue.

"Why did you come for me to-day, Angus?" I asked.

"Because we have a friend at our house whom Mary is very anxious to introduce to you."

"Who is it?"

"Oh, I can't answer all sorts of questions! She 's not a very talkative lady—but you must wait till you see her."

He drove close to the gate—I sprang out and went to the house alone. Bridget's honest face smiled all over, as with floury hands she opened the kitchen door.

"Sure, miss, ye need n't have come round this way," she said.

"There was no path to the front door, Bridget. I will leave my rubbers behind the stove here. Where is Mrs. Holmes?"

"Had n't ye better warm ye first, and take off your things?"

Bridget's suggestion was timely; my fingers ached with the cold. The kitchen was very neat, the stove sent forth volumes of heat, and a savory smell came from the oven.

Mary was usually busy here in the morning, assisting and directing her willing and trusty servant.

"You are housekeeper, then," I said.

Bridget smiled again. "Yes, miss, but the bread won't be afther risin' when the misthress is away, and me pies all bake too brown. Are ye warmed enough?"

I had risen from my seat while she was speaking. Stepping before me, she opened the bedroom door, and, radiant with smiles, ushered me in.

"Edith, I am so glad you are come."

"Why, Mary Shelton! Angus said you had a friend here you wished to introduce me to."

"Did n't he tell you any thing about her?"

"Not a word."

"She 's a very wonderful little lady—come and look at her."

I raised the bed-clothes softly:—there was a tiny specimen of humanity nestling beside Mary.

"Take it up," she said. "Did you ever see such a little thing?"

"Don't break its neck," said the nurse; "put your hand under its head—so. I don't believe you 're used to babies."

"Oh, dear! must I hold its arms too? Please take it, Mrs. Allen; Mary would never forgive me if I should kill it."

So Mrs. Allen took the tiny burden, and I sat down beside its mother.

"Will Emily be here to-day?" I asked.

"No; it is too cold to bring Addy. She came a little while yesterday morning."

"What does she say to baby?"

"Oh, it 's plump, and will be pretty one of these days."

"The little boy did n't seem to think so," said Mrs. Allen.

"No," said Mary, smiling. "Mrs. Keene was here with Eddie when Emily came. He looked at the little thing silently, only drawing a long breath when his mother laid it down. But when Emmy said it would be pretty one of these days, he looked skeptical, and asked his mother in a whisper if I should keep it. 'Certainly,' she told him, 'why not?' 'Because, mamma,' said he, 'that baby

never will be pretty in this world; and I should think she would rather give it back to God, and let him make a little angel of it, if he can.'"

"Eddie can't see why all babies are not pretty," said I, "and I don't much wonder at it; but then they are so innocent and helpless, people—that is, interested people—have to love them. And I suppose you think that before long it will look intelligent, and, of course, pretty; then, by next winter, it will learn to walk and talk; and, in a few years, before you begin to realize the fact, she will be a woman."

"Oh," said Mary, "I don't dare think of it! This little, helpless creature has an immortal soul —a soul to be saved or lost. And I must give direction to that mind—must teach it, judge for it, exerting over it an influence that may last through all eternity! God has created another soul, and given it to me. How shall I keep so precious a charge!"

Mrs. Allen slipped quietly out of the room when she commenced speaking, and we were alone.

After a time, the conversation turned on Angus.

"He has changed very much since Winnie's death," said Mary. "His manner, I know, is the same, but his heart is softened and humbled. I think he is a Christian."

Glad tears filled her eyes, and she looked up at me, smiling through them. "I am so, *so* happy, Edith."

"It is through your influence, Mary."

She shook her head. Ever self-distrustful—fearful lest her example should not be consistent—leaning on Jesus, to whom she committed her dearest hopes, she ascribed it all to the grace of God.

"I am very weak, Edith," she said, "even my strength is weakness; and when I try hardest to lead dear souls to Jesus, I fail utterly. But He accomplishes the work in His own good time, while I am learning a lesson of faith. But Ernest—poor Ernest! Edith, you do not know how my heart yearns over him. He is among unprincipled, reckless men; without even the remembrance of a wife's love at home to keep him from falling when tempted. Edith, I do not think Julia has any affection for him. Her influence over him has been an evil one:—it is hard to say so, but I can not help it. When he was very young—not more than sixteen—he fell in with two or three young men, older than himself, who, though not openly vicious, taught him lessons of wickedness that he learned rapidly. After a time, father found it out, and prevailed on him to give up their society; but he was restless and discontented, and finally went away from home, with father's sanction, and entered college. He was fond of study, and, for a year or two, made rapid progress. But one day, in a fit of passion, he struck a tutor who had offended him, and refusing to apologize, was expelled from college, and came home.

"Father's manner, you know, is very gentle;

and he soothed and calmed his irritated spirit, yet could not make him see that he had done wrong. Next to father, De Witt had the greatest influence over him, and we were very happy when he seemed trying to make amends for his past misconduct. De Witt, though fearless and impetuous, was careful not to offend him; and father reasoned with him kindly on the course he had been taking, till he promised to hereafter shun bad associates. 'I should have been a drunkard, and a confirmed gambler before this time but for you,' he once told him; and father took encouragement from this acknowledgment, praying that his child might be kept from falling. That winter he went south, spending a portion of his time with father's brother in Florida. Falling in with a class of wealthy, gay young men, he was ridiculed because he would not yield to the temptation that had so nearly ruined him. But a merciful Providence watched over him; and for once—oh, how glad I was to hear it—he was strong enough to resist. He returned, you remember, when you were at our house; and from that time he was changed. I did not fear him as I used to, and I felt that he loved me, and us all..... When Ernest married Julia, the old temptation was again placed before him. She could see no harm in drinking wine—of course any person of common sense knew when he had taken enough; she never offered it to fools! He was 'blue'—a perfect saint, she said: oh, if he had only merited the name! and so, by alternately

taunting and pleading, she won him over to her side. She had triumphed. It was a miserable, unwomanly triumph, but she did not know it. She has deliberately worked his ruin; leading him on, step by step, to the very verge of drunkenness—then, when gentle influences might have saved him, leaving him to sure destruction, and endless despair!"

"And your father?" I ventured to ask.

"Poor father! he looks older by ten years, than he did three years ago: I fear it is killing him; though he hopes almost against hope that his boy will yet be saved."

XXVI.

"God keeps a niche
In heaven, to hold our idols! and albeit
He brake them to our faces, and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised complete—
The dust shook from their beauty—glorified
New Memnons, singing in the great God-light."

SPRING was coming, and with it, Willie! Was it any wonder that I was glad when the last patches of snow shrank away, and melted from the hill-side, and birds returning from the south sang of warmer days, and sunnier weather, while they built their nests high in the tops of the great pine-trees?

There were no winter storms to fear now: no gales sweeping far out at sea, to whisper to troubled hearts—

"There is danger on the deep!"

Even now out on the blue waters, homeward breezes fill that sail. Oh! bear it quickly westward.

The bright days are very long. All night I dream of his coming. The longest night must have an ending: morning dawns in the gray east.

At last he is come. The vessel is in port.

I know it as the carriage rolls down to the

wharf—from the masses of hurrying men—the eager, expectant faces that throng the streets.

Never brighter morning shone on earth; never birds sang sweeter.

With half-tremulous joy, I sit and close my eyes while the coachman goes in quest of him.

He is almost here! A hand is on the carriage door—I start forward, eager to greet him.

Why, oh why does he delay his coming? Why must hope be so long deferred? Why must the heart grow weary with vigils—sick with fear?

A package is given me, the direction in a strange hand.

Unsteadily I break the seal. I can see but five words clearly, though many others are traced there:

"We buried him in mid-ocean. . . . . ."

Smoothly the carriage rolled along the level streets.

The roar of the city died away to a murmur. Sights and sounds of busy life were left behind—far behind the green meadows, and long stretch of road.

The air was fragrant with the scent of white apple-blossoms, melodious with the singing of birds.

Within the carriage I sat, motionless—a mist over my eyes; beside me, lay an unsealed package.

Tall trees bent over the road; rocks dark and craggy stood out from the hill-side, and beyond, the bright river rippled in sight.

Oh! why did not darkness, in pity, cover all? Why did not the blackness of night and tempest—the thicker blackness of despair, pall the blue heavens, and come down on earth, blighting and crushing all that the senses hold beautiful—all that the heart holds dear?

Shall I tell you? It was because the Saviour stood there only a little removed, His dear hand extended in blessing. It was because the stricken heart prayed dumbly, "Thy will be done," and God's angel calmed the troubled waters, whispering "Peace!"

The mist that dimmed earth, revealed Heaven; and its atmosphere of love, descending as on radiant, angelic wings, breathed of joys eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

Oh! Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief! Thou didst in infinite pity stoop to heal the broken, bleeding heart; with thine own gentle hands thou didst bind up all its wounds.

Dear head that bowed in death on Calvary, how gloriously art thou crowned! I will bear earth's cross meekly, in thy strength, oh my Jesus! crown me thine at last!

The divine, compassionate presence departed; and while all earth and heaven were filled with light, darkness gathered over my soul: darkness that vailed earth, and shut out heaven.

Alone in my little room, I read that letter. It spoke, at first, hopefully—then fearingly—then

with a calm, settled consciousness that we might not meet again. It told of struggles with self, of self-conquerings, of doubts, and sorrows, of final peace.

It spoke of a child-like trust in Jesus, of casting itself on Him, of meek submission to His will.

And at the last, when the hand grew powerless, and the eyes dim, another penned the words that dying lips whispered.

"Edith, my last prayer is for you. Oh! go to Christ, your compassionate Saviour, trusting in His merits alone. Tell Him how you have wandered from the fold of God—ask him to guide your feeble footsteps homeward. For long months I tried to find the path myself; but not till I knew that I was lost, and prayed to Jesus like a wearied child, did He lead me gently, lovingly home to God."

Far into the night I sat holding the precious letter. Slowly blinding tears blotted the pages. Then in strong supplication I poured forth my soul to the Redeemer.

"Take me—oh, take, and make me all thine own!"

And Jesus heard the prayer. From that land of glory, where my dead Willie lives a blessed angel—where Christ reigns eternally, light descended—the light of His reconciled countenance.

No more despair—no more distrust—no more fear. Once, twice had a voice spoken,

"Be still and know that I am God;" and si-

lenced, yet not subdued, I listened. But now, softer accents came with healing to my wounded spirit:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Sainted mother! behold thy repentant child! He in whom thou trustedst heard thy prayer of faith, and in His own good time has fulfilled His purposes.

Dear, dead father! thy Edith has sought her mother's God, and found Him!

Ransomed Willie! The prayer that ascended with thee to heaven pleaded before the throne, and brought thence an answer of peace.

And thou, oh my Saviour! crucified afresh by our sinfulness and unbelief, stand beside me in every hour of darkness. Lay thy dear hands upon me, and consecrate me thine!

XXVII.

In April, Emily left the parsonage. Grass and weeds grew rank around the door-steps, and robins built their nests in the shrubbery beneath the windows.

Mr. Armstrong went to board with Angus and Mary, and I seldom saw him. But I was not alone.

Hard as it was to part with Winnie's child, Emily left the little Addy with me, and I had something to occupy my mind.

"Auntie," he called me; and as I listened to his soft voice, my heart grew tender, filled with all holy thoughts. He had his mother's loving, trusting spirit; and I prayed that my love for him might not become an idolization.

As I rocked him to sleep in my arms, I talked to him of the dear Jesus and the blessed angels; and as he closed his eyes, he whispered,

"Tell more, auntie."

I could not believe that he was born a sinner—could not believe that he would ever do wrong.

To me he was an angel; bringing love, and peace, and hope back to my heart, and leading me upward to his home.

Angus and Mary came often to see me, and together we talked of the present, past, and future.

Early in the summer Emily came and spent a Sabbath with me. At sunrise we went to the brook; and standing by the foot-bridge—our own foot-bridge—spoke of dear father Holmes, and Winnie, and Willie—dear ones whom God had separated from us.

The sun touched the ripples as they danced on, curling around the stones. Wave after wave washed the white shore, breaking in the light, and rolling back into the shade.

Very beautiful was our river always;—at noon, when a-glare with light—at evening, when the sun, low in the west, revealed its bed of stones, and sand, and pebbles—beautiful when the rain dimpled it all over, or the snow whitened its banks; but never more beautiful than now. Its soft murmurs were prayers; its bright, melodious ripples praise; and with these voices my heart ascended in thanksgiving.

That day, with Angus, I took upon myself the vows of God, consecrating myself to His service.

And when, ministering in His name, our pastor gave the emblems of Christ's body broken, and His blood shed for us, and spoke of the great army of martyrs and apostles, holy ones of whom the world was not worthy, with whom Christ's chosen should one day sit down to the supper of the Lamb, I prayed that I might live worthy of the name wherewith I was called, that I might rejoice with

my beloved ones in the kingdom of God, when He should send for me.

The years passed peacefully, with little change.

Addy was the light of the great old house, and his gentle ways won every heart.

Every year I took him to see his Aunt Emmy, spending often a week in the pleasant village where she lived, beloved of all her husband's people.

His children called her "mother," and rendered ready obedience to her every wish.

"Truly, Emmy," said I, "the heart of your husband may safely trust in you."

She was very happy; and God blessed her, making her last days her best days.

One summer vacation, I sent for Mrs. Talcott, and she came with Kittie Russell. Calm and quiet as ever, she enjoyed the walks and rides we took about the village, manifesting her pleasure in her face.

Kittie never seemed happier in her life. She had not grown old nor sedate. There was the same spirit of mischief sparkling in her brown eyes, the same smile dimpling about her mouth. In all things she was like Kit Russell of old, only gentler.

But she was going to leave her old home in a few months, to find one among strangers in the "Far West."

"With whom are you going?" I asked, as Mrs. Talcott told me; and Kittie blushed, as with her usual frankness she unhesitatingly answered,

"Mr. Hall."

De Witt Shelton had succeeded in making Kate Hyde "listen" to him, and now he had a home in New York; and with her beside him to "suggest, encourage, and stimulate," was rapidly rising in his profession.

For two years nothing had been heard from Ernest.

Julia led a useless life at his father's, suffering little, enjoying little. Once, when she was sick of a fever, and her life was despaired of, Mary was sent for.

She remained two weeks, watching constantly beside her, till she was out of danger. When she returned, she brought me a letter directed to Winnie. It was the last one her father ever wrote; the one whose loss she mourned over so long.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"Julia was delirious," said Mary, "and talked constantly about Winnie and a letter. One day she started up, and asked me to bring it to her, telling me where I could find it. 'Will you carry it to her?' she said, and would not be satisfied till I promised. I laid it in my satchel, and as she said nothing more about it, it slipped my mind till I found it on taking out my clothes yesterday."

For what purpose Julia had stolen the letter, I could not tell.

"Can it be this, Mary?" I said. "Can it be that when she saw it was useless to attempt to win Angus, she wished to revenge herself by helping Winnie on to love the man her father and Angus disapproved of?"

"Could she have done such a thing?" said Mary.

"I'm afraid she could. Winnie told her she had only half read the letter, and you know if she could be prevented from finishing it, her father's advice would be of little avail."

XXVIII.

"I have wrought and studied slightly—
Thou who knowest all things rightly,
From my heart's love, but not lightly,
Mold a friendship that shall last."

PASSION FLOWERS.

DEAR little Addy was sick. His uncle Angus came three times a day to see him; and Mary came often with the good minister who so loved little children.

But he sank very fast; and my heart died within me as the little parched lips forced by pain, murmured,

"Oh, auntie! auntie!"

"Have I loved him too well?" I cried. "Oh! God forgive me, and if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, Christ gave me strength to say, 'nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'"

"Jesus!" he whispered in his sleep, and I thought the angels were waiting for him.

All night long, he lay like one dead: but toward morning he with difficulty turned his head, and putting up his dear lips, whispered,

"Kiss Addy, auntie."

"He has almost reached Heaven," said Mr. Armstrong.

Angus, who had been bending over the bed, looked up with a smile.

"Thank God! Edith, the crisis is past!"

And I did thank Him. From a full heart the voiceless prayer ascended. "Thou hast crowned my life with goodness. 'Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.'"

With the warm breezes of summer, new life flowed in Addy's veins. Every day Mr. Armstrong came to see him—every day did he watch for his coming.

"Oh, auntie, don't you love him!" he exclaimed, as, wrapped in his little double-gown, he one morning sat on the pastor's knee.

"Yes, dear."

"And you will always love him, auntie?"

It was not Addy who spoke this time.

"Always."

"Edith, the prayer of many years is answered!"

"And you have been a brother to me, for many weeks."

"Is that all, Edith?"

"Yes."

He kissed Addy, and laying him gently on the bed, passed out of the room.

All day long, I walked as in a dream. Now, sorrow at his evident disappointment filled my eyes with tears; and I sat down alone to think over his words, and to wonder how he could have loved me so long without my knowledge.

When Addy was strong enough, I went with him one warm summer morning, to the seminary.

But it was no longer my home. Mrs. Talcott's was the only familiar face in the whole house. Even Bridget's place was filled by a large red-haired Irishwoman, who did not know me.

A tall, sallow, near-sighted assistant teacher occupied my room; and as we approached Kittie Russell's door, three little misses rushed out, then scampered back, as soon as they were aware of the presence of a stranger.

I did not care to go any farther.

"Oh, Mrs. Talcott!" I said, as we went down stairs together, "if the good old days could only come back again."

"Would you be willing to live them over, dear?"

"No—I think not. But it all seems to me like a beautiful dream; and I sometimes sit and think that those were my palmiest days, and that life has nothing left for me, but stern reality."

"Every passed year seems a dream, Edith; the present only, is reality. In a little time, you may look back on this as the brightest period of your life. If life is not altogether aimless, it can not be entirely unhappy."

"I have had a great many disappointments, Mrs. Talcott."

"My child, they will fit you for higher joys. Without the discipline of sorrow, character could not be fully developed, and we should not truly know ourselves."

One autumn day, just at dusk, I was returning alone from Mary's, when Mr. Armstrong overtook me.

I had not seen him alone since our interview in Addy's sick-room; and remembering this, knew not how to commence conversation with him.

"Then, Edith," he began after we had walked for some time in silence, "you have a sisterly regard for me?"

"I have."

"Can it never be any thing more?" His voice grew mournful as he said, "Edith, I have hoped that I might be worthy of your love."

"Oh, do not speak so!" I said, hastily; "I can not bear it! My heart is buried beneath the ocean. Love some worthier one: I could not make you happy. I will be your friend always; do not ask me to be more."

He said nothing, and I dared not raise my eyes to his face.

How could he love me? I had never seen but one other man who seemed holy—whose life seemed hid with Christ in God.

We walked home in silence, and I did not see him again in several days.

Early in the winter Aunt Nellie died, and the old house remained tenantless. The crazy shutters beat against the windows, and the snow drifted in at the kitchen door, that the driving storms forced open.

At night, when the winds rioted there, shrieking

through the empty rooms, rattling the sashes, hurling the shutters from their rusty hinges, some affirmed that the ghost of Aunt Nellie walked up and down the rickety stair-case, helping on the destruction of the old house; and frightened children, huddled close together in chimney corners, believed they had seen her faded dress flit by the windows, or heard her hollow laugh ring across the fields.

In December, a rumor reached Maplewood that Ernest Shelton was dead. A miner, recently returned from California, had heard that he was dangerously sick of a fever in the summer, and as his companions all left him, it was supposed that he was dead.

Mary, who had corresponded with him since he left home, had not received a letter since June. Angus sent immediately to all who were acquainted with him; but his fate seemed involved in mystery.

Poor Ernest! Mary was almost inconsolable. She had hoped, with her father, that he might yet be reclaimed; and this was the end!

It all seemed dream-like to me. I could not realize it. The ways of God seemed mysterious; past all finding out. The one thought filled Mary's mind—

"Why could I not have been with him when he died?"

"Perhaps he may yet be living," I said; and the thought seemed to bring a ray of hope to her heart.

But the fear, the suspense, robbed her of all peace.

Julia took a different view of the matter.

After declaring her utter inability to live without him, she contrived by the usual mode of prolonging human life, to exist three months; then laying aside the weeds of widowhood, married a man of princely fortune, and beggarly principle, and immediately sailed for Europe.

One stormy spring morning, Mr. Keene called, and inquired for me. It was unusual for him to come at that hour, and wondering what his errand could be, I went hastily down stairs.

"I have seen Shelton—Ernest Shelton!" were his first words as I entered the room.

"Mr. Keene!"

"I met him in New York, yesterday."

"Is he coming here?" I asked, hurriedly. A thought of Julia flashed across me, sending the indignant blood to my temples.

"No: let me tell you. I met him in the street, but should not have recognized him, had he not spoken to me. He has fallen very low."

Could it be? Ernest the beautiful! Ernest the noble! Ernest, who once floated before me in visions, ever half divine!

"Had he heard of Julia's marriage?" I asked, falteringly.

"No; but he inquired about her, and I told him."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. I asked him if he would come here with me to-day, and he answered, unhesitatingly, 'Yes.' Last night I received a note from him; here it is."

I could not recognize Ernest's hand-writing in the tremblingly-traced words before me. The note ran thus:

"DEAR SIR:—

"You spoke kindly to a miserable outcast, to-day, and he thanks you for it. I promised to go home with you, because I feared you would detain me if I refused. Do not try to find me; I can not see my friends. I do not wish Edith and Mary to know how wretched I am.

"ERNEST SHELTON."

"I thought I must tell you," said Mr. Keene; "you can tell Mary what you think best."

XXIX.

"My heart is full of songs unsung
That shame the slowness of my tongue;
And God beholds how thronged with praise,
My thoughts walk down the silent ways
That lead from life."

It was a bright, cool autumn day. The warm summer, with its bloom, and beauty, its singing birds, and soft breezes, bringing a dream of perfectness that leaves nothing to be desired—nothing to be hoped for, had passed; and in its stead, reigned mild October, peaceful and bright.

High up among the maple limbs, crimson leaves glowed side by side with the soft green foliage, and the oak leaves took a deeper shade than they, fluttering down to the road beneath the horses' feet, and the wheels of the carriages that rolled along the village street.

From the first of these, Mr. Lockwood and Emily alighted, and entered the church, well filled with expectant faces; then, Mr. and Mrs. Keene, Angus and Mary, walked up the aisle.

Two stood before the altar, and Mr. Lockwood spoke solemnly affectionate words to them, and asked God to bless them.

The bride was neither young nor fair; and there was nothing striking about the other's face, except the deep, dark eyes, that were so spiritual in their expression.

Before this same altar the coffin of the old pastor was brought.

Here his child in happy girlhood stood, and promised to love, till death should part them, her faithless husband.

And when that parting came suddenly, they brought her coffin here, just where the pastor is now standing with his wife.

Three days afterward a stage rolled down a long hill, at the foot of which lay a busy town.

"He (Herbert, he wishes me to call him) had told me all about it, as we rode for the last ten miles alone. He had told me, too, of his mother and mine; and my heart was already full of love for her.

"Will she love me, Herbert?" I asked.

"She does love you, Edith."

Glad tears filled my eyes as he spoke.

"Your heart is not all beneath the ocean now, Edith?"

"Not all."

"And you have more than a sisterly regard for your brother?"

"Rather."

Mrs. Armstrong was very nearly what I had

fancied her to be. Gentle, intellectual, sensitive, sympathetic; oh, how much was Herbert like her.

I did not love her at first to be disappointed afterward. Hers was a character that must be studied to be appreciated.

"Does not Edith remind you of Sarah?" she asked, as we three sat in her little parlor on the afternoon of our arrival.

"Very much. It is strange I never thought of it till to-day: I have often spoken of her to Edith."

"I have buried my husband and five children," she said, turning to me; "you and Herbert are all I have to love now."

Two happy weeks passed quickly, and Mrs. Armstrong returned with us to Maplewood. Herbert's people wished to build him a parsonage near the church; but I could not consent to leave the old house.

"Some of my happiest days have been spent here," I said.

"And my happiest," said he.

My grandmother's room was the pleasantest in the house; but as Mrs. Armstrong was in feeble health, I fitted up the music-room for her, placing by its west window my grandmother's great arm-chair—hanging my own book-shelf, filled with choice volumes, within reach.

I took down from the windows the heavy curtains, putting up light muslin ones in their stead. By the south window, where the sun shone in

brightly, was a stand of plants, some in bud, some in blossom.

The room was ready all but the workstand.

Maplewood could not furnish one pretty enough, so I sent to the city. The next day it came; and while I placed it beside the arm-chair, bringing a footstool from my grandmother's room to complete the arrangements, Addy's little feet pattered through the hall, and in a moment his curly head appeared at the door.

"Auntie, may Eddie come in? he 's got a little kitty."

"Yes, dear, you may both come in."

Eddie held his kitten with both hands, hugging it close to him.

"Shall I take her?" I said, as he sat down with her on the hearth-rug.

"No, ma'am—she would n't stay with you."

"What are you going to do with her?"

"Give her to Addy's grandma. I wish I had a grandma!"

"She will thank you very much. I know she loves little kittens, and she will certainly love this one, because it was yours. What is its name?"

"Lily, I call her:—mamma said it was a pretty name. Ain't her fur soft?"

"Oh!" said Addy, "whitey, whitey!"

He had not overcome his propensity for smoothing kittens' fur the wrong way, and now indulged in it, much to Eddie's annoyance.

"I shall have to take her right home if you do

so," he said, authoritatively; and Addy drew back with a quivering lip, and hands folded behind him.

"I guess if you 'd give her some milk she 'd get down out of my lap," suggested Eddie.

"Some milk! some milk!" said Addy, starting for the door.

"Tell Jane to bring me a bowl of milk, Addy—a bowl of milk, remember."

"Yes, auntie, I 'll 'member."

As Eddie conjectured, kitty left his lap when she saw the tempting milk on the hearth.

Little Lily was a novelty in the house. It was a perfect wonder to Addy how she could lap so fast with her tongue; and he was very anxious to see if he could drink in the same way.

"Now," said I, "you may go and call grandma."

Away went Addy, laboriously climbing up the stairs. Presently he came back, prattling merrily.

"Now, come, grandma," he said, pushing the door wide open. He knew that she had not yet seen the room, and was very proud of the honor of ushering her in.

I did not ask her if she liked it—if I had arranged all to please her. But she told me—not in words, but in an unspoken language that I read with a heart full of joy. She smiled as Addy led her to the arm-chair, and her eyes were moist with tears.

That winter was the happiest of my life. My

grandmother's room was Herbert's study; the dining-room was no longer lonely—the whole house no longer gloomy nor too large. For little feet trod the halls and the long staircase, and pleasant voices charmed the great old rooms, till they seemed no longer haunted with grim shadows of the past.

One cold November day I sat with Herbert in his study. He had been reading me his sermon; and from that we went on to speak of life—its aims, its discipline, its end.

"And you, Mr. Armstrong, are doing so much good," I said, "while I am doing nothing."

"Nothing? Who took the little orphaned Addy, and filled his young heart with love for Jesus? Who has made life so beautiful to me? Who has been more than a daughter to my mother?"

"Not *more*, Herbert. But these I could not help. What self-denial have I exercised? God has blessed me with health, and an abundance of this world's goods. Oh! if I only knew of some way in which I could do good! But there are no suffering families here as there are in cities."

"There is one thing, Edith."

"What is it?"

"Would you be willing to adopt a child from the Orphan Asylum? I have been reading an appeal in their behalf."

I hesitated.

"Homes must be found for these little ones

somewhere, and those who are best able are often least willing to take them. Would it be too great self-denial?"

"No, Herbert. I was thinking how happy we are here now, and—"

"Should we be less happy then? I know it would be a great care for you, Edith."

"That is what I want—I was selfish at first. When can you go to the Asylum with me?"

"So soon decided? Perhaps you had better talk with mother about it."

"Certainly; and if she approves, when shall we go?"

"To-morrow, if you choose."

I gave the matter earnest thought. "Have I sufficient patience," I asked myself, "to train the minds and hearts of children? I love Addy so well—could I love another as well? If not, I should be partial, perhaps indifferent to the other, or even neglectful." Then I again talked with Herbert, and asked his mother's advice; praying that I might never have occasion to repent of the decision I had made.

The Asylum was a large brick building in the suburbs of the city. It stood alone—cold, unsocial looking. The very sight of it damped my ardor.

The matron took us to the school-room, where the little ones sat for the greater part of the day. It was a comfortable room, but looked exceedingly bare and unattractive.

The boys had old, unchild-like faces, and stared

at us—some listlessly, some dejectedly, as we passed among them. There were few bright faces there—few pleasant ones.

As we went over to the girl's side, a pair of dark eyes looked up at me with a smile. Pausing a moment, I inquired her name and age, asking several other questions, to which she gave quick, intelligent answers.

"What do you think of her, Herbert?" I asked in a whisper.

"I think she has a very interesting face and pleasing manner, but—"

"But what?"

"People always select the brightest and prettiest children first; that is the reason why you see so few of them here."

At that instant a loud voice near us called to the matron,

"Must n't Mary stop crying, ma'am? she joggles the desk so."

A little emaciated creature, scarcely four years old, sat sobbing on a low bench.

"There, child, sit up and be still," said the matron, approaching her.

The little breast heaved and swelled with the effort she made.

"Who is she?" I inquired; for my heart was touched by her distress.

"A little sickly thing, ma'am, who has only been here a week. Her mother died just before

she came here, and she is worrying after her the whole time."

"May I see her in another room?"

"Certainly."

The matron led her, still sobbing, into a large bed-room, and left us alone. The little creature sank down on the floor, burying her face in her lap.

She was very thin, and very pale, and very plain.

Under ordinary circumstances I should have taken no notice of her.

"Come to me, dear," I said, lifting her up.

She came mechanically, and I took her in my lap.

"Will you be my little girl," I said, "and come and live with me? I have a dear little boy at home—he will play with you, and be your little brother."

She looked up at me with tears still in her eyes.

"Mother! mother!" was all she said.

"I will be your mother, dear, and little Addy will love you, and grandma."

Then Mr. Armstrong came and took her in his arms.

He understood children better than I, and they understood him. She lay quite still with him, never once taking her eyes from his face.

The matron brought her coarse cloak, and a hood that almost hid the little face from sight; and I wrapped my shawl around her as she sat on

my lap in the sleigh. She did not speak once; but when I looked into the depths of the great hood, the large gray eyes were wide open.

"Edith, you have had the long-coveted opportunity of exercising self-denial," said Mr. Armstrong, as we left the city streets. "Are you happier than you were before?"

"Very much."

"She was the most unprepossessing child in the room:—the other was beautiful."

"Ah, Herbert!"

"Do you wish you had taken the bright-eyed one?"

"No, indeed! She did not need a mother's care like my poor little Mary."

When we reached home she was asleep; so I carried her up stairs, and laid her on Addy's bed.

She did not awake till evening. Then I took her in my arms, and brought her down to mother's room; but she clung to me closely, and would not look up till Addy brought kitty for her to see.

"What shall I do with this little timid creature?" I said.

"She will become accustomed to the house and the strange faces in a few days," said Mrs. Armstrong. "Bring her to me."

Children are usually attracted by old people; but Herbert's mother had so gentle a voice, and such winning ways, it was no wonder that my little girl sat quietly on her lap, often stealing shy glances

at the pleasant eyes that smiled on her, though never daring to smile in return.

A few days wrought a great change in the little stranger. She and Addy were excellent friends, and Eddie was received with some degree of favor.

Mrs. Keene and Mary were both "auntie." Of their husbands she was very shy, not venturing to call them by any name.

Mary's little Emmie was a gentle, retiring child; but between her and my Mary, there seemed to be little sympathy; either preferring Eddie, or Addy for a playfellow.

"I no longer wonder that you and Angus should have discovered that you were congenial spirits," said I to Mary, as with Mrs. Keene we sat in mother's room, and watched the children at play.

"Nor I, that you and Mr. Armstrong should have made the same discovery," said Mrs. Keene.

"Nor I, that you and Mr. Keene should assimilate," said Mary.

"And I do not wonder that you should all be so happy," said Mrs. Armstrong. "While you are teaching these dissimilar natures to implicitly trust in and obey you, you are preparing them for a higher degree of obedience; making yourselves instrumental in the salvation of souls."

My little Mary was human. She had a human will, that was hard to be subdued; a human heart, that often led her astray. And when a look would touch Addy's heart, and send him weeping to my

arms to ask forgiveness, she would sit cold, silent, seemingly unmoved.

But at night, when he lay sleeping, quietly, the large gray eyes would be filled with penitent tears; and "Dear mother," softly whispered, when I stole to her bedside, meant always, "Will you forgive me?"

At times I would sit and look at her, while she played with her doll, or rocked Kitty in doll's cradle, and wonder where I had seen that same expression—that same smile. And though I could never remember, I was fond of studying them, and of trying to recall all the faces I had ever seen.

One pleasant Monday morning, toward spring, I stood arranging the books and papers on Herbert's study-table.

It was his birthday, and I took more than usual pleasure in placing the present I had prepared for him, where it would meet his eye when he first entered the room. Every thing was in perfect order—there was nothing left to arrange; so I sat down in his accustomed seat, in momentary expectation of his arrival.

Near the seminary stood a large, old fashioned church, from whose high-backed slips, two generations of Mrs. Talcott's scholars had listened to the venerable pastor, taking copious notes, from his slowly-delivered discourses.

With this pastor, Herbert had exchanged for the Sabbath; and as I saw him in the pulpit of our little church, it brought vividly to mind past days.

I knew that my old teacher would hear Mr. Armstrong preach, and that he would probably call on her before his return: perhaps I should hear something from Kittie Russell, or Ellen Willard, both of whom corresponded with her.

Little Mary sat on the floor, playing with some sea-shells: Addy was below with his grandmother.

Half an hour passed; the stage went by the door; he had not come. All day long, I watched and waited.

Just at dusk, I heard the door open, and knew his step in the hall. He did not first go to his mother's room as usual, but came directly up stairs.

"Herbert! where have you been?"

"Did you think I was lost, Edie?"

"I did n't know what had become of you; what has kept you away from home so long?"

"Come and sit down here, and I 'll tell you. I believe I have some message from Mrs. Talcott. One of your school-mates—a Miss Hayward, I think—has her second husband."

"Louise Hayward! is it possible? And did she say any thing about Kittie?"

"Not a word. Edith, did you inquire our little Mary's surname, when we took her from the asylum?"

"No; I thought it a matter of no consequence. What is it?"

"Mercer—her father's name was Henry Mercer."

"Adrian Lee! Herbert, you are not in earnest!"

He said nothing, only looking steadily at me, with his peculiar smile.

"Adrian Lee: he was married at Savannah, just before Winnie died, you know. But how came his child here?"

"Mary's mother's home was in one of the Northern States; it is supposed she was going there with her child. A person, in very feeble health, I have ascertained, came to a hotel in the city, with a little girl, apparently about four years old. The mother died in the night; and as nothing was known about her, the child was sent to the Asylum."

"And how did you find out all this?"

"By means of Mrs. Talcott. She has lately taken a great interest in the Asylum, and learned through the matron, that you had adopted a little feeble child, whose mother had only been dead a week. On inquiry, she ascertained that there were letters in the trunk, directed to Mrs. Henry Mercer, in which this child was mentioned; and Mrs. Talcott knowing that to be the real name of Adrian Lee, told me this when I called on her."

"Oh, Herbert, how wonderful!"

"And yet, far more wonderful things are constantly occurring in this world, though they seldom come under our immediate observation. You will not love little Mary less, because she is his child?"

"No, Herbert; though, I am afraid, if I had known it four months ago, I should never have adopted her. And is this what has detained you so long?"

"Yes. I have tried in every possible way, to learn something further about her, but all to no purpose."

"And it is Adrian Lee's smile that I have so often seen on her face—the expression of his eye that I see almost daily, in hers. Why could I not remember?"

The winter passed, and the spring-time; and the summer brought increase of joy.

"What more could I desire?" I asked, in the fullness of my heart, as I saw Herbert, gentle, Christ-like—holy (oh, was it wrong to call him so?) —winning souls to his Master, that should be seals to his ministry, and crowns of his rejoicing forever. Or, as I felt that his mother by her bright example, ever uniform—consistent—raised my mind and heart above earthly things, keeping it from idolatry. Or, as my darling children, claiming love and tender care, kept me from selfishness, and daily taught me lessons of faith. . . . . .

Kind reader, my story is finished.

I sit beside a window overlooking a pleasant garden, bright and fragrant with flowers; beyond it, tree-leaves stir in the soft breeze, and a river twinkles in sight. There is an old brown house on the other side; and though I can not see it, I have it all by heart.

It is lonely and still and now, with closed shutters and bolted doors, and rank grass growing over

the mossy door-step. But there was a time when the treasured dead walked there; when lip answered lip, and heart heart, and my tremulous hand grasped dear hands that lie folded in eternal rest. And my heart will wander through those blessed days, dreaming them back again.

Tears blot the paper, and I turn my head away.

I am alone in Herbert's study. His chair stands beside the table; there lies his unfinished sermon, and over it white roses shed their perfume.

I brought them there this morning, and called them his inspiration.

"And they were, in part," he said; but his inspiration is more than half-divine! He does not love my flowers because they are beautiful, alone, but because they speak to him in audible voices of His goodness, and His love.

Oh, my heart is full of joy that overflows in tears! for God has blessed me, even to pain!

Like the summer in its fullness, my heart has nothing left to desire.

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

"Hold up my goings in thy paths that my footsteps slip not."

The door creaks softly—a figure crosses the threshold, stealing lightly to the window; a hand reaches over my shoulder, taking the pen from mine.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil."

"She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life."

THE END.

SH